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THE OLD STAG

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ESSAYS

The Lone Swallows

THE OLD STAG

STORIES

by

HENRY WILLIAMSON



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To
Windles' Mother

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STUMBERLEAP

When I was a little boy at school, I hated nearly all my lessons—Geography as much as any. I remember the drawing of maps (but not the maps) and the putting-in of capes, rivers, bays, and mountains; the dull lists of towns and places I had to learn by heart; and what things, usually of commerce, the places were “noted for.” It was dreary work, for usually I was thinking of other things—of how, if they would choose me for the team, I would kick a goal for my House, amid cheers, as the whistle blew; of a steam engine or an electric motor in a catalogue; of a raft to be made of boxes and provisioned by free samples, and steered by a compass out of a Christmas party cracker, with which I should set out on an exploration (I didn’t know where); but most often I thought of the wild animals and birds—especially the birds—of the fields and woods I knew. And any reference I found, in any of the lesson books, to a bird or an animal—it must be an English one!—how my mind took hold of it, and dreamed on it, as a green weed takes hold and dreams on a brick wall in the smoke of London. There was, I remember, but one green and living plant in all the waste of the big Geography book we “did lessons from,” and that was a paragraph against

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a map of south-western England, which said that Exmoor was "noted for" the wild red deer, because it was the only place in all England and Wales where the red deer had survived in their old wild ways. I think I used to hunt a red stag every Geography lesson, with a bow and arrow; I was a mighty hunter, although really my arms were very thin and I was no good at fighting. And now I am grown up: and perhaps in some school a little boy dreams of the wild red deer which Exmoor is "noted for"; and here is a story of a stag for him, which is as true as my small knowledge of Stumberleap can make it. It is not a quarter as good as the proper *Story of a Red Deer*, which Sir John Fortescue told me he wrote during a fortnight's holiday to please a small boy; but Sir John Fortescue was bred in the country of the deer, and saw them as a child on his native moor, while I saw them only in the Geography book.

Now if that dull Geography book is still in misuse, which I hope is not so, it will be wrong, for it said that the red deer roam wild in but one part of England and Wales, on the high and tameless tract called Exmoor; whereas in Wales is a wooded hill overlooking the Severn Sea, and in the wood lives a wild stag who sometimes gazes across twenty miles of water to the dim blue moor of his birth. That book will be right again one day, perhaps before it can be corrected; for a stag's life is as a tree's, whose lost branches measure its years; and the last antlers have grown and dropped from the

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stag's head. He is a solitary, and this is his story.

The hound Deadlock nearly died in the last chase of the stag, but eleven thorns fastened his wound until I brought him to the farmhouse, where he grew well within a fortnight. But his pace was gone from him; and he was drafted to the otterhunters who walk in the valleys.

First I must tell you a little about the life of "the girt old stag of Stumberleap Wood," as he was called by the farmer. Several times I saw him, before the staghunting season, once in the Badgeworthy valley in June, when his coat was glowing ruddy-gold, for he was fat with young corn and roots plundered from moorland farms.

And during the rutting season I saw him coming down from the hills before an October gale, driving a herd of hinds. Three young male deer followed the herd, and sometimes one would approach too near a hind, when Stumberleap would charge back and the young deer would race away. The old stag was gaunt with sinew and muscle, in shape of body not unlike a donkey, but taller; the hair of his flanks was shaggy with mud, and he was thin with so much travelling and fighting. They say on the moor that at such a time a stag's blood is black and poisonous, and that he eats nothing for weeks. The grey gale fell upon the valley, the oaks shuddered in the rainy wind, and as I crouched under a rock Stumberleap was seen against the sky. His head was thrown back as he roared a challenge to any other

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stag that might be in the goyal. Then bending his neck he dug his antlers into the boggy ground and tore up grasses and sods, which the wind flung away. Again he belled. So brazen was the note above the wind that terror entered into me, and fearing lest when he crossed my scent he might charge back and drive the brow-point through my body into the trunk which sheltered me, I climbed the tree. The bark was rough with lichen, and I scrambled along a branch in order to watch, as another bellow had answered Stumberleap. Immediately he roared back, and trotted forward, and while I sat on the creaking bough a strange stag came forward to meet him. The points of the stranger's antlers made the outline of a crown, whereas Stumberleap's was a forked head. Both stags jumped round, feinting for an opening to stab and point. While the gale passed over the sombre moor they thrust and drew back to watch, but suddenly Stumberleap leapt up, and plunged down his head, and the horns clashed. With fury they wrestled and swayed, breaking the soft leaf-mould at the hill's edge with their slot, until the crown-headed stag (who for three days and nights had hardly eaten or slept, for every breeze that drew across his nostrils had made him more feverish to travel and seek the hinds of his rivals) was so buffeted that he was thrown down the slope. Again the antlers clashed, and a young hind stole back from the herd and butted him in the flank.

She had been conquered by Stumberleap, and loved him. The stranger seemed to lose strength, and after a minute he backed away and ran into the undergrowth. Stumberleap threw up his head, stretched his thick neck, and bellowed; then rose on his hind legs and sniffed. I saw the instant alertness in the fine eyes of the head upheld. He scented man. The deer were gone, and the rain and the wind blurred all things in my sight.

Stumberleap must have been hunted many times before that October, as he had possessed all his rights—the points called brow, bay, and tray—some years previously, at the age of five years. Until his sixth year he was not called a stag, but a male red deer, and as such not warrantable, or worthy of being chased. Every April his antlers began to grow, and every following March they dropped off, and then Stumberleap hid himself in a wood, and avoided all deer; the horns started to grow again soon afterwards, when blood and nerves rushed up the two beams (which were soft and tender, and gave him pain when anything touched them) and formed the points known as “brow, bay, tray, and three-point-top.” Six points came on each beam at the beginning of his sixth year of life, and were fully formed towards the end of July, when the horn became hard, and the protecting skin, or “velvet,” cracked and peeled off. His horns itched, and Stumberleap travelled to the fir trees growing on the high ground above the sea, and rubbed his

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antlers against many trunks and branches to ease the itch. Many of these trees were dead, the bark having been ringed by stags in former summers, so that the sap could not rise, and they withered.

He grew bigger with the years, and took only the best food—he sought the buds of the ash and beech in March, and crunched the leaves of the ivy. In the early summer he roamed far into the green valleys below the heather moor, and wherever he went he pillaged crops, orchards, and gardens, exercising the rights of his race which roamed there thousands of years before the soil was tilled and sown by man. For the red deer were of more ancient lineage than any other creatures on Exmoor. Many races of the chief hunter, man, had lived there, and the red deer had remained. Their instincts were uncorrupt, and came pure from the earth-spirit, which had given them fleetness and grace, and a pride of race that prevented them mating with the tame fallow deer of the parks. Exmoor is a true child of her mother the earth, and her abiding pride is the tall red deer.

And now, in the twentieth century, while another human civilization was decaying, some of the farmers made straw-stuffed dummies in their own image, and placed them in the beech-hedges guarding the root crops, to frighten the wild red deer ! Stumberleap ignored the oddmeddods as he walked down the rows, biting a tur-

nip, often pulling it up and throwing it over his shoulder, to tear off the juicy flake between his teeth. Sometimes he and other stags would ruin a whole field in a night, but the hinds were not so destructive, for their necks were not so strong, nor were they so impatient. Cornfields he 'used,' tearing mouthfuls of the golden ears, while the hinds wasted hardly a berry. To keep out the wild red deer the farmers put wires on the stone banks, fixed with tarred stakes, but Stumberleap easily leapt over the obstacles, although they kept out the hinds, which preferred to scramble up a bank or through a beech-tree hedge.

But most of all Stumberleap liked the acorns which fell from the oaks in autumn. He swallowed them without munching, as many as he could find. He bolted apples until his paunch was filled. At seven years of age the points of his antlers were thirteen, and in his fifteenth year he carried fifteen points, and three offers (which were little knobs on the beam, as though points had offered to grow there). His head was an 'imperial,' or, as the harbourer described him, he was 'brow, bay, tray, five p'n-tap, four p'n-tap.' Five top-points on one beam, four on the other.

Many of his sons had been killed, but Stumberleap lived, because he was cunning and knew the waters. He lived through so many seasons that no one knew his age, and one morning in September, when the brown heather-bells of the commons were dry and honeyless, and a golden

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haze brimmed the goyals and lay lightly on the hills, he was dozing under his favourite oak tree, unaware that a little oddmedoddery man had seen that his slot on the deerpath led into Stumberleap Wood, and not out again.

The little ragged man was known as the harbourer. He was the huntsman's secret agent. He had not seen the stag for a week, yet he knew where he had been, where he had drunk, and what he had eaten. Indeed, he did not need to see the stag, for he could read easily his comings and goings. His nose and eyes were almost as keen as a wild animal's, and his clothes were tattered like lichen.

He knew 'the girt old stag of Stumberleap Wood' by his slot, or hoof-print. A hind's slot was smaller, and had only a slight cleft between the two halves of the hoof, whereas that of a matured stag was wide, the halves were longer and more pointed. For the last three sunrisings the harbourer had gone to the soiling-pit of Stumberleap—where every dawn before going home the stag went to drink and bathe—and 'made good' his slot.

In July the stag had returned to Stumberleap Wood, and the harbourer had seen in a goyal several trunks of rowan-tree and alder with their bark ringed, the work of a stag with itching antlers, desiring to rub off the velvet from the new hardening horn. During August he had come occasionally to the soiling-pit, which was

made by the cutting of turf during previous summers. The water was black with old dead heather roots. He read the slot of stag, hind, staggart, pricket, or calf, as easily as he knew trees by their leaves.

September came, and a meet was fixed at Stumberleap Farm, a mile away and below the wood, built on the ridge which rose between two valleys, called the Ball. The day before the meet the harbourer did not go near the wood, but he went to the soiling-pit in the early morning and slurred with his boot all slot imprints. At sunrise next morning he saw the fresh slot of 'the girt old stag of Stumberleap Wood,' with those of a staggart, or young male deer. Then he walked to a young ashtree on the way from the pit to the wood. The tree was a perpetual cripple. Not only were its four sapling-trunks half-cut, so that they bowed to the ground, but all its younger branches, which had striven to grow upright, had in past springs been maimed in a like manner. And every May its leaf-shoots were cut. The harbourer glanced at one new spray, and turned back downhill. He had seen what he wanted—stag's teeth had hastily torn at one spray in passing: he had not been hungry: therefore he had torn it when going to his layer, or bed, after the night's feeding.

The harbourer hurried to the farmhouse, where with the grooms he ate a hearty breakfast of eggs, bacon, hog's-pudding, and fried bread, washed

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down with a quart of mulled ale. Afterwards the ease of legs drying before a fire, while he waited for huntsman and tufters, and his guinea from the master.

II

Stumberleap Farm was a long stone building roofed with slate. Bright yellow lichens spread in patches over the walls and roof. Starlings sang upon the great square chimney tuns, in the cracks of which grew ferns of wall-rue and hart's tongue. On the top of each tun two slabs of shale were mortared in the form of a triangle, to cut the winds which in winter would pour down the chimneys. Beeches and pines surrounded the cluster of house, barns, and shuppen. One of the beech trees was hollow and had held the nest of a brown owl every spring for half a century. On a thick branch parallel with the ground a rope swing was tied, and the farm children played here, swinging from the same branch from which their great-great-great-great-grandfather had hung after a raid by the robbers of Hoccombe¹ goyal.

In one of the stable buildings six hunters had been in stall for several hours. Presently, at ten o'clock in the morning, grooms in shirtsleeves and unhitched braces were polishing bits and stirrup irons, and unrolling bandages from tails and

¹ Popularly called Doone Valley.

cannons. There was the clack and stamp of shoes on the stone floor. These were the spare mounts of the master and the two hunt servants. In the stall of another building stood a clipped Exmoor pony, with old grass-champ on its dull nickel bit, carrying a saddle with irons and buckles rusted by the moor mists of many seasons. It had been born on the moor, and driven with its dam into Bampton Pony Fair fifteen Septembers since, and purchased by the farmer for a guinea. The farmer had carried it away under his arm, squealing and kicking, but since its fifth year it had carried him many thousands of miles, and eaten many apples from the paunches of stags for whom the morte had sounded.

At half-past ten, the time of the meet, over a hundred people had come to the farm. Hunters neighed, men and women smiled and chatted, moved about greeting friends; pink and grey and tweed coats made gay colour in the field behind the farm. The sun of a fair September morning dropped its gold into the dewy freshness of the valley. In blinding spikes and splashes of light it moved up the southern sky, above the sombre moor whose summit undulated with the four curves of Dunkery's cloud-high crest. Seen from the Ball, the moor's outline against blue space was like the back of a monster petrified in the fires of earth's creation, showing black bristles singed almost to the roots; westwards the last paw-stroke of the dying monster had made

claw-rips in the steep slope of Lucott Ridge.

The people on Dunkery Beacon, tiny as singed bristles, saw the horsemen waiting on the Ball a mile and a half below them. Black and scarlet specks moved by the farm, near one of the barns in which, pacing restlessly the clean straw, sitting moodily on haunches, throwing up heads and "zinging," the hounds were shut. Three couples of tufters had already gone with the huntsman and his whipper-in. Already they were approaching Stumberleap, and while the mournful "zinging" of hounds made the male starlings on the roof listen in order to imitate, the harbourer took the huntsman to the path where that morning the stag had entered the wood after his night's feeding. The tufters were old hounds, wise and trusty, and their job was to make Stumberleap break covert. The trees grew in the sides of the goyal, which diminished in depth and width until it ended half-way up the great slope, grown with heather and whortleberry, which stretched up to the crest. The watchers on the Ball saw a red speck on a grey horse cantering through the bracken along the farther edge of the wooded goyal. This was the whipper-in, who was to watch where the stag would run. Then they heard the horn faintly singing. So did the stag, where he lay in dread of the return of a fly whose wing-whirr he had just heard—a red-bearded bot-fly that was circling with almost inaudible flight above his head, ready to dart into his nostril,

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and squirt a drop of fluid containing tiny maggots, which would hook themselves to the skin before he could sneeze out their parent. When he heard the horn he pressed his chin on the ground, and waited. He knew what the horn meant.

A hound whimpered in the wood, but the stag did not move. He listened. The bot-fly settled on the long shaggy hairs of his upper neck, and washed its silvery face; for Stumberleap was not breathing. The stag heard the chaunt of the huntsman, and the more abrupt cries of the whipper-in farther away. Then a hound threw its tongue, and jumped forward, followed by other tufters. Stumberleap jumped up, and one of his top-points furrowed the bark of a branch above his thrown-up head. One hound made as if to run in upon him, but stopped, remembering.

When the huntsman came up he encouraged hounds with horn and voice, and the six tongues clamoured about him. Stumberleap kicked at one, and drew from it a yelp of pain. The others pressed upon him, he sank slightly upon his haunches, quivered as he pressed all his strength into his muscles, and sprang over hounds and away among the trees. *Forrards!* cried huntsman, and at the sound the harbourer, waiting at the edge of the wood, cantered to a place where it was possible to observe the going away.

Stumberleap, however, did not mean to leave the wood. With a clattering of horn against

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twigs and small branches he ran swiftly to the bed of the staggart. This male deer, four years old, bore only six points on his antlers. Since the previous winter he had followed Stumberleap wherever he went, feeding with him, soiling in the same pit, and lying near him by day. Now the old stag came to him and he sprang up, but would not leave his layer. Stumberleap reared up on his hind legs, then plunged down his head, and his antlers rattled against the antlers of the staggart. For a few seconds only they fought, and then the staggart, overmastered by his sire and terrified by the approaching clamour, turned and ran away. The tufters running the line of Stumberleap came to the bed, hesitated, and catching scent on the wind, pursued the staggart.

The huntsman heard him crashing through the bushes, and stood up in his stirrups to get a better view. He did not think that it was the stag, and an instant glance told him that hounds were pursuing the wrong deer. He called, and the whipper-in galloped along the ferny edge of the wood, crying the name of hounds as the wrist-power of his curling thong cracked off the lash into the air. They were called off, and the huntsman took them back to the stag. They roused him and drove him up the wood, but he returned again, and for more than two hours he refused to leave. He was trying to wind another deer, in order to force it to run for him. He

found none, and at last, followed everywhere and unable to shake off pursuit, he made for the bracken outside the wood. Short repeated notes of the horn twanged through the trees, and at this signal the whipper-in cantered forward to a place whence he could observe. Hardly had he checked when Stumberleap broke out of the wood, and in a lurching canter set off over the heather. On the crest he stopped, looked back for a moment, and was gone.

Without delay the huntsman returned to Stumberleap Farm, and the prolonged notes of his horn echoed in the goyals. At once the groups of men and horses around the stone buildings began to agitate. Farmers mounted their moor ponies, taller and sleeker hunters capered and whinnied, bowler-hatted grooms in black coats cross-braced with spare stirrup-leathers held bridles and threw up into saddles ladies in habits of brown, grey, and blue. Girths were finally inspected, and reins laid flat on necks—"Steady, old mare, steady!" Pedestrians dodged dancing hoofs, and the farmwife looked on, bidding her children keep close to the threshold. Mournful singing of hounds changed to eager chorus as the rain-rotted wooden doors of the barn were pulled open, and the great hounds immediately pushed through. The pack trotted under ash-trees and the gold-blotched shade was transferred to heads and backs, tiger-like. A cowman, whose face, arms, and collarless neck

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were brown as old leather, said to farmer's wife: "The girt old zstag of Zstumberleap Wood be zsparking now, a' reckons," which meant that the stag was away at a great speed, fleet as the brilliant pinewood spark that shoots out of the hearth and vanishes.

The cowman was right. When the pack was laid on to the line from Stumberleap Wood the stag was ten miles away, travelling swift and untroubled on his native moor, slanting up the goyal-sides with the ease of clouds in the blue sky over him, the halves of his slot spreading wide at each thrust.

For the first mile he had blown as he ran. He determined to cross the moor to the pool in the water he knew so well. After the first mile he got his wind, but his tongue still hung out. He traversed a common where the wiry stems of ling and bell-heather grew with gorse and bushes of whortleberry. Behind him was silence. He ran at the biggest furze bushes, gauging height and length and scarcely checking before rising up and over with the ease of tense strength, clearing the spikes with forelegs tucked back; so faultless his eye that not a spike was touched by foreslot polished and black. A light landing, and on again, over the common to a goyal, a deep narrow groove in whose turfy sides boulders were embedded, on which lizards and vipers were basking. His passing made them hide, and he went down until he came to the shady bottom where a

small stream tumbled and bubbled over a clear brown stony bed. He lay in a pool, lapping the cold water, and then rolled, kicking his legs and tapping the stones with his antlers. He rejoiced in the soiling, then rose and shook himself, listened, and went in a slant up the coombeside. At the edge he met the sun again, and fled swiftly, while the blackcock crouched at the terse thuds of his feet. Sheep with curled horns stared at him, soon to be left far behind. The ground rose steadily to the line of the sky more than two miles away, but there was another coombe between, into which he descended. He ran in shallow water up to the stream's end among rushes and red-withering grass and rusty-filmed bog-water, where a curlew flapped up crying with bubbly sweetness, *cur-leek, cur-leek*. He never paused, but ran over tussocks of coarse grass and wild cotton plant to the summit, just under which was a bank of stone and earth six feet high. There was a slight break near a gate, but he avoided it, and choosing the highest part, slowed to a trot, tautened sinew and muscle, pressed his hindlegs under him, and jumped. Miles away one of the watchers on the Beacon saw through binoculars a speck rise out of darkness into a mist of light, and vanish again.

Stumberleap was now travelling over the high ground where in some years the winter snows lie beyond midsummer, it is so high and cold under the sky. He turned south, and cantered down

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the long rough tawny slope until he came to where the sparse heather rooted itself in a soil of dry grains which once were rock. Its stems were blackened by the summer sun, and twisted with the struggle to hold the life-water. Whitish lumps of hard marble-like stone lay in the sandy patches; the everlasting wind would one day make them dust. Across the treeless place he ran, over patches of scree shining like sun-sores, and going down into a goyal where grew thorns grey and hoary as though with hair, for everywhere the lichens clung to their wood. The thorns grew close, and Stumberleap knew it would be hard going for the hounds—whose feet were not horny like his own slot—and that the thorns would wound nose and pad. For half a mile he ran the bed of a stream, on the banks of which bracken grew under ash and holly trees. Again he drank and soiled, afterwards lurching down the water while trout darted zigzag from his shape to hide in still caves under the brown slimy boulders. Leaving the water before a footbridge made of a thrown tree, he climbed the steep side of the goyal again, bursting through bushes to delay pursuit, and crossed a further goyal. Leaping up to high ground once more, he looked back before trotting on at slackening pace. He disturbed a middle herd—about 60 head—of deer which was resting with heads to leeward. Some of the hinds had calves with them, and when they saw Stumberleap they sprang

out of the gorse and bracken and ran away, knowing that he was being hunted. Stumberleap tried to mingle with them, but was shunned. For half an hour he followed the herd, then turning away he made for the retreat where always before he had hidden unseen. He ran in a loop of many miles. The sun of the afternoon was hotter in the goyals than at noon, and the air was thickening.

A motor-coach was making a cloud of dust less than a quarter of a mile away as Stumberleap crossed a road. The driver stopped, and the people in it stood up and gazed. They decided to wait and watch the hunt go by, but after ten minutes, when no one appeared, the coach drove on. It had gone a mile along the narrow lumpy road when they met the huntsman, and by their timely information the pack was saved twelve miles of the loop, and laid on again where the stag had crossed the road. Huntsman and whip mounted second horses. The long-drawn file of hounds ran silently. Behind them a string of riders coiled over miles of moorland. Some horses had been bogged, others had gone lame, or lost their way, or were dead-beat. Sixteen and a half couple of hounds loped into the heather. They ran mute, without fatigue, without haste. And Stumberleap, topping a ridge by a tumulus, half a league distant as the blackcock flies (but a league by running) heard the thin echo of the horn. His heart pounded, his tongue dripped.

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And the hounds ran on, mute and inevitable as the hours that passed. The sun of September became an orb of larger and duller gold rolling down to the sea, which could be seen grey and remote from the breezy hill. The wind had changed, and now was blowing from the south-west, from the headland dark blue beyond the remote sea. Above the headland, and travelling in ponderous silence towards the moor, was a black and ragged cloud, and others came after it, bringing the friendly deluge that washes scent from earth and air. Stumberleap knew that the south-west gale was coming. His sinews and muscles had lost their tension, no longer did he fly five-barred gates and banks. But he was nearing the refuge which had saved him many times before. He descended another goyal, and entering the stream at the bottom, drank and soiled, and rose refreshed. Upon the opposite bank he leapt, bounded along beside the river for a hundred yards, suddenly sprang sideways into the stream again, and ran down. Trees grew here, and magpies scolded as he passed. For two miles he ran the bed of the stream, until he came to a pool near the ruined hut-circle of a primitive tribe. Into the pool he sank all but his head, and waited in the shadow of a rowan-tree that grew over it. So still was he that a pair of grey thrushes flew to the tree and began to swallow the scarlet berries. About fifty yards away a man was lying so still that neither thrushes nor stag knew he

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was there. The man never moved. The water made its music, the winged hum of flies sounded under the oaks, and all was quiet for a time.

III

From where I lay I could see the reflection of ripples gliding on his ears and antlers. Stumberleap was resting—he must have run more than fifty miles. For hours I had loitered in that sweet shady place, lying on my back and watching the flakes of the sky between the oakleaves, waiting for Stumberleap. He had hidden there before. After a while, far above me on the sunlit height of the hill, I heard the thin gleaming note of the horn. The stag heard it also, for his head moved, and a ripple spread across the dark pool. Later the voice of either whip or huntsman floated down, and I knew that the hounds were coming to the stream. Minute after minute passed. A jay flew to drink, and his smoke-grey eye saw the larger brown eye of the stag; he screeched to other jays, because the staring eye was unusual and might be dangerous. Two jays came at once, and perched on the lower branches of the rowan-tree, leaned forward and screeched. I showed myself. A jay saw me, warned his friends with a quicker note, and the three flew away. Again I lay down, and the minutes

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passed, until near me a voice said, *Hold up, you!* to a horse slipping on its haunches down the incline. Sound carries far in the coombes on a still day, and the wind was above the coombe. Hearing the voice, Stumberleap bent back his head, so that all of him was concealed by the water except his nose and the brow and bay points of his antlers. The ripples from the movement had hardly worn away when a black-and-white hound named Deadlock ran down the bank with nose to ground, followed by other hounds. The pack had divided, and were casting down the banks to find where the stag had quitted the water.

Last of all came a straggler, who nosed about among the dead bracken, and seeing me came and placed a thick white paw on my coat. He was a young hound, and I imagined by his callow look that it was his first season, possibly his first chase. I spoke to him, and he struck me with his paw, while his stern wagged like a flag. Again he struck my coat, so droll a look on his face that I knew he was begging for food. Where he had learnt to beg, in what household his puppyhood had been so pleasantly passed, I do not know. I gave him a biscuit, and after eating it he pressed his muzzle on my knee and gazed into my face with limpid eyes, the whites of which were of that tint of blue usually seen in the young eyes of the higher mammals, and is most beautiful in children. He was a great ungainly thing, with a heart full of love.

When the whipper-in trotted past on sweating mare I ordered the hound, in the usual phrase used to a rioter to "get on to him," which was altogether a despicable betrayal of the hound's trust. The whip rated Credulous, and stung his hind-quarters with his lash, so that the young hound yelped and ran away.

For half an hour Stumberleap lay in the pool, only his nose above water. Hounds had gone downwards a mile and a half; and two horsemen had followed after them. When it was quiet the jays flew back to the rowan-tree and peered at him, for his head was no longer held under the water. I heard them screaming as I returned upstream, and so did the huntsman, who was posted on the hill above. The harsh cries of the jays continued hardly without interval.

The huntsman rode down, and saw Stumberleap. He blew short notes on the horn, and I heard the whip's high voice recalling hounds. Goodbye Stumberleap, I thought, you've had a very pleasant life, and all things have to die, and if it hadn't been for the hunt you would probably have been shot or trapped before you were a month old. The pack pressed upon him, and Stumberleap swam downstream to shallower water where he might use his horns, but other hounds were there, baying in savage triumph and seeking to pull him down by the legs. Against the high bank, which the winter floods had carved, he stood at bay, the noble head held high and ready to rip hound or

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man who dared go near. But no hound dared run within the slashing area of his antlers. I saw the huntsman loosen the long knife in its sheath under his left arm, before he walked into the water with two men, to wade across the stream. The current pressed against them, soaking red coat-tails and white breeches, and filling black top-boots. The two men hoped to get behind the stag with the looped thongs to hold back the head for the huntsman's quick stab in the throat; and the spirit of Stumberleap would roam the shining hills beyond the quest of stars.

Water dropped from the rough hairs of the stag's neck, but his eyes did not flinch. They strained down at the hounds. Huntsman drew his knife. The two men felt their way step by step over the slippery stones to the opposite bank, fixing their sight on the eyes staring down. With loops ready to cast they edged nearer the stag, while the huntsman approached in front, to hold its gaze. Several hounds swam between him, and Guardsman bared his teeth to seize a knee. A couple named Fidelity and Prudence swam with Guardsman, and then another couple. The whipper-in called them back, while the two men patiently climbed on hands and knees up the bank, one on either flank. They meant to twist their thongs round the top points which almost touched his back. Now they were off their knees, and crouching; step by step they moved, until one made a sudden grab for the beam. He shouted to the other man, who had

grasped the other antler and was about to put all his weight on it when with a movement of great power and swiftness Stumberleap plunged his head between his forefeet, hurling both men into the water. Without pausing he flung up his head, rose on hindlegs, and struck down at the huntsman, missing him with his slot, but knocking him over with a glancing blow of his shoulder. Then he was across the stream, and through the oaks, the jays screeching at stag, hounds, and men.

Down the valley echoed the full-throated music of the pack. Hounds scrambled out of the water and pursued. Huntsman picked himself up, and his screaming cheer went after them. He floundered to the bank and remounted.

Another rider appeared, with battered hat, on a horse whose flanks were covered with flattened froth. Wearily man and beast forded the stream and followed up the hill at a walk. Then came a riderless horse, that had rid itself of saddle. It was not sweating—its rider must have been lost hours ago. Should I...? The rolling music diminished as the pack reached the wooded crest and went on over the hill. The horse did not run from me. I patted its neck, felt its withers; it waited quietly. I scrambled on its back, pressed my calves in, and off we cantered, up through the trees, across a heathery common, past stone hut-circles around which wild cattle were staring, for Stumberleap had gone among them in order to destroy scent. The sunshine dulled, clouds covered the sun.

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The south-west wind made a running hiss in the heather and whortleberry bushes. After a mile he had gained a lead of five hundred yards, but after two miles he ran not so fast. Down another goyal side and a brake of furze: he sprang into its centre, causing a hind who had been drowsing there with her calf to press her chin on the ground. The stag lay down, and panted. With her nose the hind nuzzled the calf, who lay silently beside her. She heard hounds, and telling her little one to follow, she ran out of the brake and down the coombe. Deadlocked the pack (with the exception of the deserter Credulous) after the fresh scent, while the hind, who bore no protecting antlers on her smaller head, repeatedly glanced back at her pursuers. The legs of the calf went so fast during the first mile that very soon he grew tired, and the hind stopped, placed her head under his ribs, and tossed him several feet into a patch of bracken wherein he immediately settled himself and lay still. The hind ran on, and the pack followed her scent up the coombeside, passing the calf who held his breath and never moved. She ran swifter than Stumberleap had ever run, and returned in a wide circle to a point near the furze brake out of which he had turned her. Twice she ran to meet the hounds, swinging round and away again when they were almost upon her. Or she may have known that it was not yet the season of hind-hunting, and that the red-coat on horseback, viewing her, would protect her. She over-ran her

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starting point, describing roughly the figure 6 inverted, and seeing the huntsman, doubled back along the shank of the figure and stopped at the bushes where Stumberleap was resting. There the huntsman knew that the stag was lying low in the brake. He and the whipper-in broke the line; Deadlock alone had to be lashed. Several times before a stag had been found in that covert. Hounds were capped into it. A hound called Psyche threw her tongue as Stumberleap cleared the brake at a bound. *Tally Ho! Yoi, yoi, then, pull'm down, yoi, yoi!*

Deadlock alone barred his way, and as the hound leapt at him, Stumberleap lowered his head and one of the upslashing points ripped him open, and with a howl the hound began to twist in a spiral, and lick his wound. Stumberleap leapt over him and crashed away through the bushes. The wind was rising, and an ondrifting pallor made trees and hill-lines hard and distinct. Clouds massy and black were closing upon the moor, and before them wheeled a flock of gulls that had come from the sea. Their forlorn cries came sadly from the heights. Already the headland behind them was invisible, and half the sea of Bideford Bay was blurred in the driven grey slats of the storm. Hounds needed neither cap nor cheer nor horn. Up the goyal side went Stumberleap, not slanting up in his easy long-striding lurch, but straight up the steep side with a slow and heavy action. He staggered over the skyline, a long file of silent

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hounds pursuing him. Over the common from which the coast of Wales could be seen across the Severn Sea; over the road bridge under which lay narrow gauge railway to Lynton, down the road for half a mile, over heath again and down a thread of water to a river. Hounds making the distance smaller, the hounds which had run nearly fifty miles and were not weary. Moisture running from his eyes made them smaller; blood sometimes blackened his sight. His heart was throwing his legs about, the storm was still afar, although the clouds were above, and a great moaning was coming across the moor. A whirling greyness was between the four remaining horsemen and the pack, and the weary rider in the topper had been blown from the saddle by the gale which was hurling itself across Woolhanger.

Down the stony bed of the shallow river ran Stumberleap, past an inn, before which a group of people stood, watching the dark of the travelling storm, and the hard grey precipice-edges of the thunder clouds. A flash which stilled speech, a waiting for the reverberation, someone counting *one—two—three—four* . . . a voice asking suddenly *What was that?* The baying of hounds! The man who was counting the seconds to calculate the distance of the lightning had counted *seven* when thunder broke upon them. Nearly two miles away. When the last stupendous tumbling of sound had ceased, they listened. They had motored to the meet on the Ball that morning, and

the last they had seen of the chase were the tiny figures on horseback toiling up by the five claw-marks in the slope rising to Lucott moor. Yes, that was a hound ! Six and a half hours from the lay on at Stumberleap Wood ! Listen. Only a straying seagull wailing as the wind hurled it overhead, while the gale tore at the trees on the hill, and and then the storm crashed upon them—*boom*, the wind screamed around the Hunters Inn, and the rain instantly beat down the swirling dust cloud.

The sea was less than a mile away. The river flowed below a towering cleave, tameless and unclimbable, its sides grey and smooth with loose flakes of shale. All things in the cleave were hidden as the hounds of the storm bayed across the sky. The wind's thong whirled, the lash of the lightning cracked, the hills resounded with the hoofs of the thunder. Far behind on the moor the horsemen rode in a bluish mist of ground lightning which flicked and swished about them, seeming to curl in lashes of light about the huntsman's horn; icy thorns of driven rain pricked necks and ears; horses swung and swirled as though in a flood.

Fed by a hundred torrents, the river rose many feet, and when the storm ceased an hour later, a muddy stain was spread in the sea at its mouth. Beyond the stain, swimming in the rolling waves, was Stumberleap, and after him, fifteen and a half couples of staghounds.

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IV

Just before dawn the bracken ceased to shake ; the wind betook itself off the moor when a golden scarecrow rose in the east. Seeing the scarecrow the puppy-hound Credulous, who all night had been shivering miserably in the wet bracken because of the nearness of the hind, threw up his head and bayed. This mournful noise made more fearful the hind, who, all the night, had been shivering miserably because the nearness of Credulous had prevented her from returning to her calf. The little creature had been quiet in the bracken ever since she had tossed him there. Credulous tottered towards the golden scarecrow, which was the waning moon, and blundered upon the calf, who was cold and frightened. Credulous was so very pleased to find himself no longer alone that he licked its soft head, whined to it, struck it with his paw, and curled himself up beside it. He slept for several hours. When he left the calf he left reluctantly to follow a human voice. So the hind had her calf again, and Credulous had breakfast with me in a farmhouse where Deadlock twitched in sleep because of the stitches in the skin of his belly.

A fortnight later he was well and back at kennels, among the remaining twenty-four couples. Fifteen days previously nearly forty couples of hounds had lain at night on the straw-strewn zinc benches above the red-tiled floors, and eaten cold porridge

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and chopped horse-flesh once a day. The pack that had chased the old stag of Stumberleap Wood never ate again in the kennel yard; indeed, when the carcasses of these hounds were eventually washed by the tides into Cardiff harbour, fish had eaten them.

NO EEL FOR NOG

On a certain afternoon in the early spring a solitary heron was standing on an islet in the estuary, near the overturned hulk of a gravel barge. The islet was formed of sand lodging against a tree uprooted in winter floods and partly reburied by the lapse and flow of a hundred salt-water tides. He had flown there from the heronry in the oakwood four miles away, and a strong east wind had swept him forward with hardly a thrust of his broad vanes. He was Old Nog, and for a living he speared fish with a long sharp beak. The old bird was working very hard just now. Gone were the easy days when with a full crop the grey fisher used to walk on his lanky legs to the middle of the sandbank, draw up one foot, lay his head in the middle of his back, and sleep, motionless as grey, dry seaweed on two sticks. No naps for Nog nowadays. He'd got two growing young 'uns, old enough, thought Nog, to leave the tree-top nest and learn to fish for themselves. As, however, they wouldn't leave, Old Nog had to work thrice as hard, for unknown to him his mate had been struck down and killed by peregrine falcons a week ago as she was spearing her seven-hundredth yearling in a trout farm. He missed her very much, and since the moon had grown

bright he had fished all night, being so hungry.

The tide on this afternoon was nearly slack, and he peered keenly at the water in which he was wading to his knee-joints. The little light-coloured eyes saw a disturbance of sand-grains, the narrow head peered forward, while the wind stirred black plumes on the long neck that was scarcely thicker than his spindle-shanks. Many times he had been angered to see a wriggling and doleful specimen of a heron looking at himself out of the water. It had blue-grey plumage, streaked with black, and white in parts. Old Nog threatened it many times a day for coming where he was. It threatened him, too, holding out its ragged wings, dancing on tottery legs, and opening its beak. Fancy not knowing himself! A dull old bird, a silly old bird, so thought the carrion crows of the higher reaches of the estuary. They knew why his mate had not returned. But Old Nog was not so dull or silly as they thought, for on this particular afternoon . . . but as yet no bird of the estuary had seen the specks of death waiting on in the sky, waiting on . . .

Old Nog continued to peer. The movement of sand was made by a dab, or small flatfish, rising off the bed of the estuary where it had been lying invisible owing to a back speckled and dotted like sand. Old Nog darted at the movement, transfixing the dab with the two tips of his beak just opened. Lifting it, he threw it on his tongue, and swallowed with a shake of his head that scattered

the water out of his eyes. Another movement, in water deeper by two inches. He waded on legs like stilts, and green as rushes, peered low, struck with hardly a splash, and swallowed a shrimp. Thus he fished for several minutes, taking many dabs and shrimps, until five herring gulls which had been patrolling the tide-line, looking for carrion or fish, alighted on the water near the heron and paddled around the tree. None dared to swim near that spear of a beak.

Old Nog had many fishing places in the muddy creeks and dykes of the low marshland country of the 'Two Rivers' estuary. He visited them one after another, beginning at dawn, and going on all night, from drain to mill-lead, from mill-lead to brook, from brook to creek, and, at low tide, to the estuary islet. This afternoon he had just flown from the duck-ponds a mile away, after taking a rainbow trout, a frog, a rat, a beetle, and a duckling. The keeper had tried to stalk him, but the old heron had been standing where he could see the approach of man beyond gunshot range.

The gulls paddled around the islet, ignored by Old Nog. At the tideline of the muddy shore four yards away a curlew was walking, thrusting a curved delicate bill into craters small as pennies, drawing out worms that lay beneath, and swallowing them without a jerk, with head still lowered. Neither gull nor heron, with their proportionately shorter beaks, could suck up the food like this. The gulls watched both feeding birds. Every

time the heron struck and withdrew with a head-shake the gulls screamed, lest the beak lose its grip and fling its prey aside. Every time the curlew bowed, keen and pale eyes watched for sight of wriggling worm. A black-poll gull was near her when this happened, and ran to steal it; the curlew lifted her brown freckled wings and ran, uttering a trill of notes ascending in scale. From the beak of the gull a raucous scream came, and he ran after the curlew, but when he reached her the worm was swallowed. His ferocious attitude fell from him, and both birds went on with the intent search for food.

A small bird piped a shrill *peet-peet* as it flew across the river to the islet. It was the size of a sparrow, but sturdier, with white throat, black beak, rich auburn breast, wings and back a greenish-blue, the head and neck being barred with brilliant azure. To the tree it flew with quick flutters, perching with pink feet on a weed-hung twig. It gazed at the water, being a kingfisher, and it fished the higher reaches of the estuary every day, as regularly as the heron, flying zigzag from bank to bank, from one perching rock or twig to another. It saw nothing, and restlessly piping *peet-peet* it flew away, and had gone less than fifty yards when it saw a little fish and splashed into the water, returning to the tree to kill and swallow its catch.

Another bird was fishing near, like a large scarecrow of a duck turned pirate, black as coal with a

greenish sheen on its oily feathers. His beak was as long as the beak of Old Nog, only black, and hooked at the tip. He was Oylegrin the shag, one of the Pelican family, but, unlike his large relative, his beak had not the capacity of his belly. He paddled with black webbed feet in deeper water, and every minute he bobbed his head, tipped up and swam to the riverbed. Looking up, with his green eyes he could see any fish swimming over him as a shape shown up by the quicksilver surface. In one of his underwater swims, as he thrust along with strong pushes, his neck stretched out, he espied an eel, and opened his beak. The eel was near the islet, and as Oylegrin snapped at its tail, Old Nog, who had suddenly waded into deeper water, darted his neck forward and speared. So swift the judgment, so precise the angle of striking, that the points pierced the slimy skin of the eel and drew it curling and lashing from the water.

Observing the eel the five herring gulls screamed, and beat their wings to arise and fly about the heron. Out of the water bobbed the head of the shag, and the eel's tail was seized in the hook-tip. The kingfisher flew up-estuary, the curlew walked away, for she was a gentle bird, a lover of water-murmurous solitude, and disliked the wrangling of gulls. From the spear-tip of heron's beak the eel was pulled by Oylegrin, and it dropped into six inches of water, to be gripped by the sharp edge of the shag's mandibles before it had time to

writhe in one curl. Spray was beaten by the big black wings immediately, for Nog speared the eel again. Shag tried to swallow it, his green eye fierce, and the crest of feathers on his head risen with fury. He threatened with a greasy mutter in his throat, while two beachcombing crows flew from over the water to see what might be doing for themselves. They perched on the hulk and waited; eel, wounded heron, maimed shag—and what might be in their crops—anything and everything, dead or alive, was food for crows.

Old Nog got the eel again, but before he could throw it up and gulp it into a crop already laden, Oylegrin the shag had gripped the tail end. The spearing and buffeting and nipping soon killed the eel, although its nerves continued to twitch and flick in death.

While the birds were struggling, neither managing to swallow the eel, something was seen by the gulls and crows. The effect was immediate. *Krok-Krok-Krok* said one of the crows, and they were gone from the hulk, beating wings faster than usual as they fled silently over the water to the oak trees on the bank. With a gabbling cry one of the herring gulls made off, followed by four others and the smaller blackpoll. Oylegrin the shag, at the verge of the scratched and spurred sand of the islet, wary for the stroke of the heron's spear-tip, suddenly turned away and vanished under a bulging water-ring. From this ring ripples spread out and disappeared in the frothy

tops of wavelets. Oylegrin bobbed up fifty yards away, breathed, took a glance skywards, bobbed under. Beside a stone crouched the curlew, head to wind, immobile and coloured as the stone. Only the heron had not seen what the others had seen.

Squark! cried Old Nog, very satisfied, as he picked up the eel. After many tosses and jerks it joined the duckling, the beetle, the rainbow trout, the frog, and the rat. Then leisurely spreading his grey vanes he jumped into the wind, tucked a scraggy neck between shoulders, stretched out his long thin legs behind him, and beat towards the heronry, four miles away. Half a mile above him, steady on pitches in the wind, three birds, sharp in outline like specks of slate, were watching him, and—in an ancient term of falconry—were waiting on.

They were peregrine falcons of the ancient and noble house of Chakchek. A Chakchek was famous among falconers throughout Europe during the reign of Queen Elizabeth. A Chakchek founded the northern eyrie upon Lundy Island, whose cream-breasted peregrines are still considered the finest in the world. A Chakchek surveyed the battle of Trafalgar. Another slew the Frenchman's message pigeons before Sedan. One was in Ypres during the first bombardment. A Chakchek was hunting the airways of the Two Rivers' estuary as the ships went over the bar to

join Drake's fleet; centuries before, when Phœnicians first came to trade; long, long before, when moose roamed in the forest which is now gone under the sand, drowned by the sea.

They were Chakcheks, father and mother and son—tiercel and falcon, and a young male bird of immature plumage, an eyas hatched and reared less than a year before, in the month of May. There had been two daughters. One hunted in Scotland with a mate; the other had been shot off the coasts of Florida. Chakcheks have wandered from Spitzbergen to Samoa; they are free of the winds of the world. They attack eagles. No man knows where the old birds go to die; for there are no old Chakcheks. They die young, beloved of their god. Noble they are, of lineage as ancient as the first gods of man, and their god is older, being Altair in the constellation of Aquila, a night-sun with gold-flickering wings.

The wind of early spring blew cold at a thousand feet, but the peregrines, one above and beyond the other, felt neither heat nor cold. Their feathers were tight against bodies. The parent birds were slatey-blue of back and creamy of breast, which was thinly barred in black. The eyas had a dark brown back and dingy white breast, draggled brown. He was the heir to the eyrie of Bone Ledge. Their beaks were short and curved, with yellow skin round the base, and their eyes were full, liquid, and dark, steadfast with an untameable hauteur, eyes which saw many times as keenly as man.

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The wind did not rock them. They were as though fixed in the sky. They waited on. They saw the gulls, the shag, the crows. These slunk away, and the lank grey bird launched himself. He had gone two hundred vane-flaps when the tiercel cried "*Chak-chek-chek!*," turned on his side and slipped from his pitch. With beak to earth he beat his wings ten times, then closed them. The falcon followed, and the eyas. The triple-cut air whined as though in complaint.

Old Nog saw the tiercel falling upon him, and shifted with violent flaps, and Chakchek dropped below him. Two seconds later the falcon swished past him, and the eyas followed so quickly that he was struck at an elbow joint, and feathers were struck away. He cried *Krark!* and as the three made their points—shooting up perpendicularly with the impetus—the heron climbed, swinging round with the wind and making ring after ring. In long spiral curves he mounted towards the clouds, but ring after ring the peregrines made also, rushing downwind for half a mile and tearing round in a great banking circle that shot them up hundreds of feet. Chakchek mounted to his pitch above, at such a height that a man watching below could not see him. Again the grand stoop, again Chakchek fell past the heron four hundred feet before he could make another point. Old Nog tried desperately to climb. He was too weary. He opened his beak and the eel fell out.

Down came the falcon—than whom the tiercel

was smaller by a tierce, or third—driving at him with yellow feet spread for black sickle-claws open to rip up his back. Old Nog rocked, and nearly overturned. He could see the leafless oak-trees of the heronry, and young birds standing in the topmost branches, beyond the winding of the river and its sandy wastes. The clouds were high above him, but reach them he must. He cried out in his fear as the eyas fell upon him. The dabs, the rat, and the rainbow trout followed the eel. The tiercel was ringing again, climbing three yards to the heron's one, level but distant half a mile upwind at one moment, two hundred yards over and passing downwind at a hundred miles an hour a few seconds afterwards, and three minutes later almost out of sight. *Krark! Krark!!* cried Old Nog dolefully, and breathing fast with his efforts. Tiercel poised in his pitch for a grand stoop, his eyes fixed on the labouring expanse of wings, every nerve and sinew tightened for the downward drive at two hundred miles an hour. He waited, his pinions crooking back with nervous false-starts many times in the ten seconds during which he was poised. *Chak-chek-chek!* He saw the line, tipped up sideways, beat a dozen swift strokes, closed pinions, and pressed every feather into a taut and quivering body, and stooped. The rush of air against his eyes was so keen and hard that he blinked the third eyelids over the dark orbs, so that he saw but dimly. Larger and larger grew the heron, and Chakchek's eyes

became clear and brown; he held his breath for the impact and spread his talons—*whish!* he had passed Old Nog. The heron escaped by a falling spin, losing in ten seconds the height he had gained by two minutes' ringing. Down fell duckling, frog, and beetle. He recovered his balance in time to avoid the falcon's stoop, but the eyas, pressing hard behind his mother, hit him between the shoulders. Old Nog tumbled, and abandoned hope of climbing above his enemies. He was flustered and shaken. He began to flap wildly in the direction of the heronry. No other birds were visible in the air. He cried out in his helplessness, and the third *Krark!* ended abruptly, for Chakchek had made his point above him and stooped so surely that he struck him and bound to the grey back with his claws. Down came falcon and eyas, giving him two more tremendous jolts, and Old Nog sank down under the weight, crying for help.

All four fell on a mudbank, near the eel, and the blow knocked the heron feeble. Immediately falcon and tiercel began to rip with their beaks, and the eyas flew arrogantly at the head. Old Nog lifted a muddy spear and stabbed so swift and true that he shattered an eye of the young peregrine. Chattering with pain he flew up, as Old Nog feeling stronger jumped up on tottery legs and faced the pair with vanes held around him like shields. The feathers of his throat and breast were muddy, and a froth of blood was on

his beak. In the ragged tent of his wings he stood grey and anxious and lank, holding up a crimsoning spear. The tiercel uttered the ringing cry of his race, *Chak-chek-chak!*, and dashed at him, to swerve as the spear flashed at his throat. Upwind flew the falcon, and cut at Nog, followed by the wounded eyas, whose hind claws nearly ripped open the narrow skull. Swoop after swoop Old Nog met with a stab; and then they flew away.

But the heron did not move, crouched in the mud, his head trembling between narrow shoulders, gazing fixedly at the sky. He watched the three birds cutting circles higher and higher, further and further away, where the wind had torn wisps of mist from the cloud-laden wains of sky. The heron watched the specks slipping downwind, swinging round, and the specks gave out a minute flickering as the peregrines climbed up against the wind. Minute after minute Old Nog stood in his tent, taking counsel with himself, his spear upright. The specks vanished in a cloud.

Old Nog flapped his vanes, and cried *Squark!* He preened his flight-quills by drawing them through his beak, and looked about him. He took several steps forwards, then sideways, then round. Again he shook himself, and flapped his vanes. *Squark!* a cry of satisfaction. A scrutiny of the sky revealed nothing of his enemies, so he looked around him, to see the eel lying not far off. Gravely he walked over to it, leaving the spurs of his three big toes on the mud among worm-

castings and empty mussel shells. Picking it up in his beak he tossed it until the head was on his tongue, and with shake and gulp it disappeared into his crop. Forthwith he looked around for the duckling. He found it. And the rat. *Squark!* said Old Nog, stalking on stilty legs after the rainbow trout. Afterwards he stood on one leg and tried to scratch mud off his plume. Thence an amble to a water-filled creek, where he watched for dab and shrimp. They had ceased feeding, and were invisible. He climbed out of the creek, and launched himself homeward.

He had flown, stiffly and laboriously, about half the way to the heronry when the three Chakcheks, who from pitches two miles away had watched him picking up the eel, half closed their pinions, and shot down an incline at nearly twice flying speed. Their wings made the shape of an anchor-head with shortened shank and crooked flukes. The pain of a shattered eye went from the eyas in jubilation of feeling his tail thrumming, his pinions hissing. He opened the toes of his feet pressed into his feathers, and the air whined as the claws scratched eight unseen lines in the sky. Behind his noble parents he stooped, and when the heron saw them he cried aloud in distress. A hundred pairs of pale yellow eyes were watching them from the heronry. They saw Old Nog shift as the falcon stooped, but he was tired, and his broad vanes too clumsy for so light a body. He tried to stab her, she crashed into the long

black flight-quills, passed behind him, turned in a short swishing curve and passed under his breast, on her back, bursting away hundreds of feathers. Seven seconds later she was bound to his back, sinking with him. The tiercel joined her. They bore the old bird down, and Old Nog ceased to struggle, and closed his vanes. But seeing below him the river, which was tidal for three miles beyond the heronry, he gave a cry and opened them in order to beat into a position for diving. With two of his enemies on his back, and a third chattering around him, Old Nog plunged headfirst into the river.

Not long afterwards nearly a hundred young herons dozing on flat piles of sticks in the tree tops, while waiting for food, poked up their heads again.

The arrival of Old Nog, bedraggled, with skinny breast unfeathered, frayed vanes, and red beak, was welcomed by a hubbub of guttural squawks. Slowly and heavily he sailed nearer to the uproar of flapping wings, stretching necks, and opening beaks. Was this a demonstration of victory, of greeting the conquering hero? Oh no, for the fight was already forgotten and Old Nog was merely a parent bird coming with food, a parent claimed by every youngster, frenziedly implored to alight at every nest and to give up what he had got. Old Nog flapped over the heronry, sailed to a branch near his nest, closed his tattered vanes, and perched swaying six feet away from his noisy sons. He hunched up his should-

ers and sank his head between them, desiring only to rest after the contest, and digest his meal. Far-away over Exmoor a young peregrine was soaring alone—his parents drowned. Chakchek is dead—long live Chakchek the One-Eyed!

Seeing him huddled on the tree, the sons of Nog, who had learned during the past few days to walk on branches, went foot by foot to where he was perched, and yelled *Pa! Pa!* so loudly that Old Nog opened his eyes. Seeing he was awake they flapped their vanes and pulled down his head. Old Nog pulled it up again; but one or the other got hold of it, and pulled it down again. *Krark!* said Old Nog, but the two graw-beys would not be quiet. Old Nog yawned, and bending down, yielded trout and rat to one, and duckling and eel to the other. Such robbery had happened to Old Nog for over twenty years—every spring he fished and toiled all day and half the night, and whenever he flew home for rest and quiet, the nestlings not only pestered him with their noisiness, but took away his food. With a melancholy *Krark!* Old Nog flapped away from the heronry, and after filling himself with dabs, walked wearily and stiffly to the middle of a sandbank, secure from man and nestlings, and slept until the tide wetted him four hours afterwards. Then, fishing for half an hour, he filled his crop, and went back to the heronry to see how the young 'uns were getting on.

BILL BROCK'S GOOD TURN

Many years ago, long before the great boar-badger withstood the last terrier-and-spade assault on his underground home in Rookhurst Forest, there was the greatest fight in the wild history of the wood. It is still told in *The Moon in the Mere*, where after the field labour of the day men sit on wooden forms and drink ale.

In those days there were trees in Rookhurst Forest; there are none now. Autumn rains bring scarlet, buff and orange fungi on the rotten stump-circles of the felled trees. The Brock holt, with its maze of corridors, kitchens and sleeping chambers tunnelled into the hillside—the work of centuries—is green with moss. In summer the entrances are hidden by the pink spires of foxgloves which have risen where the autumn beechmast crackled under the feet of swine. Rabbits burrow where once Fang-over-lip the fox crept for sanctuary; thistle and bramble cover the approaches trodden by the five-clawed pads of the badgers. And the pack that chased Fang-over-lip makes music no more: other huntsmen listen to the sharp bell-like tang of Clarion, Conqueror, and Firefly: to the mellow and clamorous notes of thirteen couples so identical in pitch and quality; to the deep

tongues of Nimrod and Solway, Thunderer and Doomsday. Nimrod the faultless! How his baying used to roll back from the wooded hill-side of Rookhurst when he spoke to the scent of Fang-over-lip, his old enemy of many seasons!

Fang-over-lip, whose mask, when he turned in his tracks, grinned at hounds—but never from wall of huntsman's parlour or squire's hall. Now to the story of how the 40-lb boar badger saved Fang-over-lip's mask, and nearly lost his own.

One winter morning Fang-over-lip lay out in the middle of the Big Wheatfield, which was ridged with furrows, and dry only in the centre. His chin rested on his paws, his eyes were shut, he was sleeping, and his nose was stroked by the wind that passed up the field to Crowstarvers Spinney in the middle. The sun was on his left. It was nearly noon, and the cold air was quiet.

Suddenly his ears were cocked, and his eyes were open, but he did not move otherwise. He heard a sound of rattled iron, the sound of a distant gate-fastener being lifted by the huntsman's whip-handle. He heard the voice of the whipper-in as in sharp authority he bade one of the hounds drop a rabbit-skin he had found in a ditch—'*Ware riot, Baronet!*' He heard the jingle of bits and the soft thuds of hooves on furrow. The pack, led by Nimrod the faultless,

the true fox-teller, had entered the north side of the Big Wheatfield, and was spreading to the huntsman's cast, noses to ground and sterns a-waver. Fang-over-lip waited for the voice of Nimrod, and as he waited a flea bit him under the ear. He scratched with a hind foot, and shook his head. He was concerned more with the flea than with Nimrod at that moment.

After a second of stillness he felt it moving down his neck, so he scratched again, balancing himself on the thigh of the other hind leg. He was still scratching when he heard a whimper, and then another whimper. The hounds were pressing round Nimrod, and their sterns were feathering. Before sunrise that morning Fang-over-lip had walked that way to his sleeping place among the furrows; hounds were three hundred yards away. He scratched no more. Nimrod was running towards him, the pack following. Fang-over-lip waited, for that morning he had not run straight to his bed, but down the wind, along the western hedge, and after a drink in the brook he had gone towards the eastern hedge, changed direction, and run diagonally across the wind until he reached his dry kennel.

He waited, and Nimrod turned, feathering. The hound was mute and his jealous rival, Bandit the babbler, threw his tongue and bounded before Nimrod.

Horses tossed their heads and opened their

nostrils; some were impatient, and fought against curbs, plunging into the crusty furrows. The huntsman took his horn from where it was between the second and third brass buttons of his red coat; the pack loped down the field.

Seeing them, Fang-over-lip knew that it was time to go, and he stole up a furrow, brush low and ears laid back; but no hound or horseman saw Fang-over-lip. He heard the tongue of Bandit the babbler, and knew that he was not speaking to his scent; the note that came from his throat was not full and mellow; he was telling lies, and the huntsman knew it too, but he trusted Nimrod, and said nothing.

The Master halted, and the field of about forty riders waited behind him, the old hands remaining by the gate to see which way the fox would run. Further down the slope went red-coated huntsman and whipper-in, but still Nimrod did not speak. He worked steadily along the western hedge. The dew had dried off the earth, and scent was weak. Bandit had turned north, and the young hounds straggled after him; Bandit threw his tongue again, that lying tongue, and several hounds whimpered. Lying among young hounds is infectious. The huntsman watched Nimrod when he came to a shallow in the brook, and seeing his stern furiously a-feather he knew that he was working true. Still and upright on his bay mare he sat, horn in whip-hand.

BILL BROCK'S GOOD TURN

By the pebbly shallow Nimrod whimpered, and leaping up the bank he ran straight and true the line that Fang-over-lip had travelled that morning. He threw a deep, hollow note. The huntsman cried, "*Hark to Nimrod! Leu-leu-leu!*" The young hounds deserted Bandit and followed Nimrod as he loped along a furrow. Bandit gave tongue and followed as well. At that moment a farmer on an old black cob by the gate stood up in his stirrups, took off his hat, roared out "*Tally yo, maister!*" and holding it aloft pointed to Crowstarvers' Spinney. He had seen the fox as it stole through the clump of hornbeam and fir. Immediately the horn of the huntsman sounded short and urgent notes, followed by little sharp ones that were like small beads of sound threaded on the morning air. The pack responded to the *Gone Away*, the light notes of Clarion, Conqueror and Firefly seemed to rebound from the solid clamour of the matched twenty-six; the tongues of Thunderer and Doomsday and Solway smote out their triple peal behind Nimrod, now mute and earnest.

They stopped at the bed of Fang-over-lip, a solid wheel of black and white and tan, nose-hubbed and compact: the wheel broke and became hounds that streamed up to the spinney and through the trees, past the dug-out of the crowstarver and through the eastern hedge to the ridge and furrow again.

A quarter of a mile below Fang-over-lip had

crept through a thorn hedge, jumped a ditch, and run across two meadows. He was making for a distant earth that he had adapted for himself years ago from the ruinous earth of a vixen who had been killed. The earth was in a lychet, or hollow, in the southern slope of the downs. Fang-over-lip knew that he could reach it in safety, so he did not run his fastest. Frequently he sat down and listened with ears pricked, with red tongue dripping sweat, and brush swishing the grass. His upper canine teeth were long, yellow, and when he shut his mouth to listen they pressed on his lower lip. When he opened his mouth he seemed to grin. He was in no hurry, he knew that scent was weak; seasons ago he had overcome the fear of being hunted; he knew that another fox was in the habit of lying out in a field near him, and wanted to be certain before the long run to the downs that the pack was hunting him. But the voice of Nimrod speaking at the hedge through which he had crept made him get on his four pads and run straight for the earth four miles away.

He crossed stubble and ploughlands, sending up partridge and pigeon, plover, finch and rook. To delay the pursuit he ran among a drove of bullocks, driving them to splash and wallow among the rushes and water-grasses in the boggy land beside the brook. He stopped suddenly and rolled, while they trotted near him, snuffling and with horns held low, ready to back and

bound away. He sat up, stretched himself and walked on slowly, the bullocks following and stamping out his tracks. Fang-over-lip had rolled and made them timidly curious to follow him because he knew that they would trample out his scent. He led them thus to the hedge, and selecting the thickest thorns he crept through and crossed other fields and lanes before reaching the short turf of the downs. There was a thick patch of dead thistles in a lychet at the base of the hill, and through this he leapt: hounds would have to follow nose-to-line and would prick their muzzles. Fang-over-lip knew many more ways of hindering and baffling a pack, but at present there was no need to exert either himself or his wits.

He lay down on a chalky cattle path a few paces above the thistle patch, and watched hounds a mile away. He saw the riders behind, some taking the fences and others going through the gates. He heard the thin twang of the huntsman's horn, and the answering bay of a hound. He waited and rested while they came nearer, and the cattle in the watermeadow blundered round their rushy field. He listened to the voice of Bandit declaring that Fang-over-lip had turned left-handed and run down the vale which led to Colham. He grinned a foxy grin, and rolled with pleasure. But the anxiety he felt under his self-confidence made him sit up immediately. He saw the first-flighters of the field wait behind the pink-

coated Master while the young hounds followed the babbler. But Nimrod, Doomsday, Solway, and Thunderer made wide casts round the field, running the hedges to find the broken line of scent.

Fang-over-lip dallied no more. He heard Nimrod baying and knew that he had found his line. The full clangour of the pack floated up to him with the jubilant notes of the horn, and Fang-over-lip fled. His brush was straight behind, pads crushing the little empty shells of snails that strewed the turf. High over head a mouse hawk watched silently, fluttering brown wings into the wind that buoyed its flight. In a groove of the downs where the plough never scarred the sward was the brake of furze and thorn under the roots of which the claws of the dead vixen and of himself had scratched out the tunnel. Fang-over-lip ran straight for the earth where he might hide deep and defy his old enemy, Daisy the terrier. By the hoarse cries of the men in the field beneath him he knew that he was seen; the hounds-chorus swelled louder. He ran swiftly over the sward which rose steeply before the lychet; he climbed the hump before the thorny hollow, to see two men with spades in their hands standing by the earth, which they had just filled in. Like a menace of certain death the deep voice of Nimrod, terrible and relentless, filled the hollow in the downs.

Fang-over-lip looked at the men during the space of five heart-beats. He thought of the other earth

in a gravel pit he had been working on at night: he thought of running up the hill and over the downs to the plain beyond—a journey he had made the winter before, during the great snow famine. He knew of the badgers' holt in Rook-hurst Forest. For this he decided to make. His heart contracted for the sixth pulse of blood as he turned his face to the sun and ran downhill. The huntsman saw him as he put his mare at the last hedge, and instinctively checked her. The slight check caused the sensitive animal to hesitate, but answering the pressure of his legs upon her ribs she gathered her hocks under her and sprang at the tall fence. Originally it had been a wire-and-post fence, but fieldfares and other birds perching on it in winter had dropped peggles and sown a hedge of hawthorn, which under the wind had grown straight and thick. Her forefoot caught in the rusty top-strand of the wire fence; she fell on her neck, and the huntsman took a toss. He fell clear, however, with muscles relaxed and head tucked in, and so he did not hurt himself. By the time he had picked himself up hounds were too far to be urged by horn and cap to where Fang-over-lip had doubled. After Nimrod they lolloped uphill to the lychet, and led by that faultless eight-year-old they streamed downhill to the plain.

Fang-over-lip was no longer cool. He ran with tongue quivering and slavering over his grinder-teeth. Over ploughland and stubble, watermeadow and winter-wheatfield he ran, creeping under

hedge and gate. When half an hour later he came to Skirr Farm, and ran through the farmyard, in a red rage against mankind that was hunting him he chased and captured one of man's tamed creatures, a turkey, and dragged it over fifty yards. Two small boys rushed out of the house and pursued him with wild excited cries; a sheepdog followed, soon outstripping them. Three hundred yards behind Nimrod ran with Solway and Doomsday, the pack just behind them. Fang-over-lip hung on to the turkey until the sheepdog snarling by his brush made him loosen his jaws and drop it. Seeing the base dog Nimrod bayed in a tongue so savage that the sheepdog immediately turned and fled away with long tail tucked under his hind-quarters like a hairy letter S.

The hounds passed the boys, and after them came the huntsman, who had a thorn-tear across his forehead, the whipper-in, two men and a young lady; behind, for nearly two miles, other riders were following. Fang-over-lip was sinking, and seeing him lie down three hundred yards in front of Nimrod, the huntsman urged them with voice and cap to a final burst. Four fields ahead the first beeches of the forest had their roots in the slope of the hillside, and he wanted to kill his fox in the open.

Fang-over-lip was in distress. His brush drooped with the weight of mud clinging to the underhairs in a lump that grew bigger over every ploughfield. His pads were hot; his heart slogging blood in

thickening pain against the base of his skull. Nimrod was two hundred yards behind him. He fell into a ditch half-filled with water, and found it difficult to climb up the bank; his claws tore long smooth scars in the clay, but he managed to bite on a root and haul himself up. He shook the water from his coat, and turned to see Nimrod less than a hundred yards away, with three hounds at his heels, running at him. Fang-over-lip stood still with lowered head and mouth opened in a grin; head, back, and brush made a curve of snarling defiance. But the water had refreshed him, and he thought he could reach the Brocks' holt. So he turned again and ran away from Nimrod with all his strength, gaining distance because the slippery clay bank balked hounds. He heard them splashing; he heard their short cries of excitement and rage. Then Nimrod was through the hedge, and gaining with long strides of heavy legs swiftly upon him. One more hedge to scramble under, a brook to leap, and he would be in the forest. Fang-over-lip lapped stiffly, and fell into the water. He paddled against its flow a few strokes, then gave up and drifted with the current. It bore him downstream; he lapped as he floated. Soon he heard the whimper of Nimrod at the place where he had leapt; he listened to the puzzled note. In his fatigue he had a desire to run no more, but to let hounds tear him and eat him, so that he could drift forever in cool waters; but the touch of gravel on his pads made him fully

awake, and fear came back with refreshment and the will to live. He paddled to the left bank of the stream, where it was deeper; softly and slowly he drifted. Then he heard, with joy, the voice of Bandit telling lies up-stream: the full, savage, joyful tongues of the pack, and the harsh *Leu-leu-leu, get-on-to-'im! Get-on-to-'im!* of the huntsman. Fang-over-lip crept out of the water, and walked stiffly uphill to the holt among the crisp brown beech leaves. He did not shake himself; he left a line of water behind him, running from the hairs of his belly.

While he was walking among the trees, Bandit had returned in silence from the false line. In the heat of the chase he never lied deliberately—his roused hunting instincts were too firm and true. During his first season he had been eager and impetuous: the huntsman had seen in him then the makings of a first-class “fox-catcher.” But from these very qualities of zeal and keenness had come an arrogance, a desire to be foremost, and the elder hounds liked him not. They had already their special friends and followers: yet Bandit’s voice had a certain authority among the young entry of the kennels. He had led the pack astray at the stream, not deliberately as he had in the Big Wheatfield, but because his quality of imaginativeness and the keenness of his desire laid the scent upstream, and he believed it was there. He led the pack fifty yards, then returned in silence.

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Meanwhile Nimrod had run the bank downstream, and finding no scent he had leapt into the water and crossed to the opposite bank. He climbed out and immediately spoke to the scent of Fang-over-lip. Hunting cries came from thirty-five hasty-breathing throats: with plunging leaps hounds blundered into the stream: a thousand rooks rose from the treetops, and the wind from black wings scattered the brown leaves on the path below. Nimrod leapt up the mossy slope: Fang-over-lip staggered in front of him. The lemon-and-white hound gained two yards to the fox's one yard, and with head thrust forward and stern thrust back he bared his teeth to chop. But as Fang-over-lip struggled on he saw before him the entrance of the badgers' holt, and the path leading to it. His brush, so heavy with mud, seemed to drag him back. He heard the throat breath of Nimrod as the hound flung himself forward in the last burst of speed. The hound leapt at the brush: the polished hardness of his great teeth snapped the air. The sudden stop flung him on his back. He turned, but the fox had vanished, where Nimrod could not follow.

II

A big boar-badger was sleeping in his kitchen, curled in a fresh bed of grass, bracken, moss and bark-fibres, all bitten into small, soft fragments.

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This oval chamber—which was a little over three feet wide and about two feet high—in one direction led along eight feet of pipe to the open air. The holt had been tunnelled, more than four centuries before, diagonally into the hillside. Many diggings by man had brought it near the light; but there were other chambers deep under the hill. A corridor led to the second chamber five feet deeper; beyond this were three more. From the last two the pipe branched. One corridor led to disused kitchens, and the other led to the exit beside a tindery beech, one hundred and nine feet from the entrance. Two feet outside the entrance were dug the latrines, for the tribe had a regard for cleanliness and health.

The badger's sleep ended. He lifted his head, sharp-nosed and small and black, marked with a white broad-arrow from brown weasel nose along cheeks and over forehead. His little eyes peered at the entrance, and he sniffed. He felt the shake of the ground, he heard in the tunnel the dull, faraway bay of hounds. He heard the thin twang of the horn; the badger-diggers used an identical horn and notes to speak to the terriers underground. He knew what it meant. He waited.

The white dimness in the tunnel was darkened. Two eyes, pale green and bleared with breath, came woefully to him. He smelt Fang-over-lip. Fang-over-lip's distressful panting filled the kitchen. He came to the badger in utter dejection. His mud-balled brush dragged on the dry

crumbled earth. The badger did not bite him. He had bitten other foxes, but not Fang-over-lip. He let him pass into the kitchen, although he liked not very much the smell of his pads and his breath. Fang-over-lip dragged himself deeper and deeper into the holt, passing various kitchens where other badgers were curled, but none of them were so big as the one on guard. They were the growing children of the big boar, and he loved them all; his mate would give him another farrow during the next month, which would be February; there was never a whelp born to the Rookhurst Forest holt in any other month. Fang-over-lip was neither welcomed nor resented by the growing cubs; he had the freedom of the holt; he crept to sanctuary deep and dark, and collapsed in a damp kitchen beside a heap of rusty gins.

The sentinel boar remained where he was. He waited in the first kitchen, and during the wait he curled himself and rested. He knew by the noise outside that a troubled time was coming. His eyes, the size of ripe hawthorn peggles, but black, blinked towards the light and his nostrils worked. Suddenly the ground shook and the baying of hounds roared down the pipe. He heard the scratching of heavy feet and the shrill furious whimper of Bandit. Minute after minute the rough roaring boomed in the tunnel air, until a long keen note of the horn and the voice of man and the cracks of a lash drove the hounds back. Still they bayed, and still the voices of huntsman

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and whip urged them down the hill. Slowly the sounds drew away, and then a single voice was heard, speaking softly, *Goo' girl, Daisy, fetch 'un out, Goo' girl, Daisy*, and the patting of the hunt terrier's neck. She was short on the leg and experienced with foxes; her yapping had driven many from earth and drain. Daisy had been riding in a leather satchel slung across a groom's chest during the chase, and she was fresh. Eager for a fight she crept gamely down the pipe, and came to the kitchen where the badger, the fiercest boar-badger in the West Country, was also waiting for a fight. His name was Bloody Bill Brock, and it was a very good name for him.

The Master, in his cap of blue velvet, pink coat, white breeches, and black hunting boots, stood upright and held up his hand. He wanted the fox to have a real sporting chance when it bolted from the sturdy terrier. The hounds were in a leaf-filled hollow fifty yards below the entrance, They could not see the earth. They sat on their haunches, alert and anxious, watching the huntsman's face and awaiting the sign of the lifted cap.

"Let no one tally, please!" the Master urged in a loud confidential whisper to the dismounted horsemen standing near, "Let no one tally when he slips out! Give him a sporting chance. No tally, gentlemen, please!"

Their voices murmured in respectful obedience. They could hear the yapping of Daisy under the ground. The sharpness of the noise was blunted

by the earth, but it was regular and unceasing. Horses in the field across the stream shook bit and bridle and pawed the ground; a mist of sweat rose from their lathered flanks. The cawing of the rooks ceased as the birds drifted away; again the Master, on hearing a sudden increased yapping of Daisy, whispered urgently, in a hoarse, sweet, burring voice—

“No tally, please! No tally, gentlemen! No tally! Please, no tally! No tally! No tally! Please! No tally!”

The yapping rose to a frenzy of snarling. The white-haired Master, immensely apprehensive lest an accident unworthy of the Hunt's sporting reputation should hap, whispered, “He's coming out! No tally! No tally! No tally!” with beseeching eyes and a finger of warning that trembled.

All stood still. The white-haired Master glanced round at the pack; he could see the heads only of the front hounds. His big blue eyes in his round red face were wide with the important moment.

But curiously his expression changed. The Master frowned. For the buried snarling of Daisy had risen to a shrill howling, telling of pain and fear, which had ended most unexpectedly in absolute silence. Not a sound came from the earth. The Master looked at his huntsman. He said one word to him, and stared anxiously at the hole. It was a circular hole, about a foot in diameter. The earth scratched out of the pipe had long ago been thrown by badgers' hind

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legs down the slope, and trodden hard and flat.

"Charlie, there must be badgers in the earth," said the Master, tapping boot with the handle of his whip.

"Big boar inside, my lord," replied the huntsman. "Never been able to dig 'm out. Known as Bloody Bill Brock, my lord. Once killed a fox at Skirr Farm."

The huntsman beckoned his second horseman, who came forward smartly.

"Go and get a couple of men with spades from the farm, Jack."

While they were waiting for the diggers, Nimrod stole up to the earth, and Captain crept behind him, with Solway and Queenie, Thunderer, Firefly and Starlight. Other hounds followed, squatting on haunches, while with breath-flacking tongues they looked from earth to huntsman's face, to whip's face, to earth again, hearkening for the voice of Daisy. It came no more.

The huntsman kneeled at the hole and turned his head sideways to listen. A few grains of earth trickled on the riband-bow at the back of his blue velvet cap. He got up suddenly, and jumped away from the hole. Bloody Bill Brock stood there looking at him. With four lumbering steps he was outside the hole. He scrutinized the Master's features, and then turned his gaze to the pack. He neither grunted nor snarled; he showed no sign of annoyance. He did not even sniff.

The tongues ceased to flack. They remained in

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whatever position they were in when the white-stripped face appeared—tongues hanging out, tongues whose tips showed between teeth, no tongues at all. The hounds had arranged themselves in three tiers before the hole, and Nimrod, the largest hound, sat behind, in the centre. When the face appeared he was swallowing. He sucked in his tongue and closed his jaws with a click and fixed the small face at the hole with an intent stare. The red haws below his eyes became more sunken. Standing motionless except for distinct but minute movements of the head each time his gaze shifted, Bloody Bill Brock looked deliberately at every hound. From Dewdrop on the left to Dragon on the right a slow scrutiny was made, and back again, as though he were estimating the strength of the pack. When his gaze returned to Nimrod, it remained there; he yawned; and then came forward, his grey squat body low on the ground. He ran straight at Nimrod, pushing through hounds in the first and second rows; he looked up into the face of Nimrod, at his bared yellow teeth and red haws of his eyes. He snapped at his paw and sunk his teeth into tendons and bones; he twisted his thick neck set so firmly on his immense shoulders, and threw the hound on his back.

Without pausing he turned to Firefly and threw her over. Immediately he was enclosed by a hot and solid wheel of houndflesh, a wheel of black and white and brown patches, a wheel head-

hubbed and snarling. Teeth found nothing to bite on the thick hide; there was no hold on the long hair. Solway tried to seize Bill's off-forepaw; he crippled Solway. Then Tunable, mother of many puppies, seized his yellow, goat-like scut, or tail; he turned and nipped her through the nose. He knew that they would try and hold him by his pads; then it would be over, and they would send him where he had sent Daisy. So he ran under Guardsman and quickly under the bellies of Grappler, Pealer, Voluble, Singwell, Vagabond and Castaway. He got clear, and waddled on as though indifferently. It was his way of fighting in the open.

The pack got angry. He went downhill, hounds behind him and on both flanks of him, chopping at his head, at his neck, at his back, at his pads.

Nimrod in fang-frothed rage limped to him; with a movement like the awkward bobbing bow of someone self-conscious of his stumpy fat legs among so many of the kennel quality, Bill turned and bit through his other forepaw. Then he blinked his ugly little pig-eyes like someone snubbed, and bit the paw of Prudence; and turning again, he bit Choirboy, a young hound who immediately lifted up his muzzle and sang. And all the way to the brook the rough fellow lumbered, bobbing left and right and blinking as though ill-at-ease among the great ones; but he bit a paw every time. At the bottom of the hill his action was neither so swift

nor so smart as it had been at the beginning of the fight. His face was smeared with red, and not all of it was hound blood. He coughed crimson froth from his mouth, for his tongue was broken by many bites. Sometimes he turned and ran among them, his little fierce pig-like eyes blinking; but it seemed that they were not quite so eager as they had been to punish him for his bad form in considering himself worthy of being hunted by foxhounds. By its smell they knew not the strange beast, and neither Bandit nor Nimrod remained to lead them. So the fight went on, up and down the hill.

The huntsman was agitated and cursing, because his hounds were being hurt. He ran down to the stream, where the kennel-boy was holding his horse's head, meaning to flick a stirrup-iron and leather from bar under saddle-flap, and to kill the badger with a blow on the nose. But the badger was downhill first, and the huntsman's mare, who loathed the smell of blood as do most hunters, plunged with a terrified snort into the brook and dragged in the plucky kennel-boy after her. Another horse, a vicious black gelding with a red riband on its tail, reared and lashed out at Baronet the rabbit-chaser, who howled so painfully that he started off another horse, which bolted among the trees and caused the pack to scatter.

But half-a-dozen couple of hounds, led by Thunderer, had not finished with him. Among themselves they swore a hound-oath of vengeance;

they heeded neither the notes of the horn nor the lash of the whipper-in. A hound called Mutinous bit the hunt servant in the whip-hand, and returned to the worry. Bloody Bill crippled Mutinous ten minutes later, after staving off their rushes for three hundred yards up the hill. He was making for the holt again, but his progress was slow as he left red drops on the leaves and mosses wherever his bitten pads pressed. He limped on at his own pace, making neither grunt nor chatter, until he waddled into the holt again and as a final insult to them, kicked a shower of sand into their faces.

This is the story they tell in the village at night, of how Bloody Bill Brock took on thirty-five hounds and one fox-terrier, in the forest of Rookhurst, and how he vanquished them. They tell also how the pack went home to kennels that winter afternoon, as though on crutches. But only the Brocks know why the mighty boar went out to fight the enemies of Fang-over-lip: whom he found on his return, slumbering in a kitchen beside a heap of rusty iron gins—two of which, old Tom Cockerlegg declares, the fox had, years before, dug up when one night he had found Bill helplessly trapped by fore and hind paws.

MEWLIBOY

Sipsitew the willow wren was there when Mewliboy was born. Sipsitew heard wailing cries in the wind and rain, and was terrified. She was crouching over her babies, who were as small as daisy buds, in the nest on the bank which had a grass roof and a feather floor. Blackthorns and brambles grew on the top of the bank, with young plants of cowflop and hemlock and ground-ivy, and the nest was hidden among them.

When the cries ceased she chirped to her mate perched against a crooked thorn stem above her in the under-voice that song birds use in the night after alarm, or when waking in the dawn.

The cries came from near the thistle that was rising from the field in a spiny green star, and were followed by the clank of iron on stone and the beating of wings, growing feeble and more feeble until the cries were choked in a sigh, which the wind bore away with other sighs of the night. Every passing of the wind set two old branches in the thorny maze talking in their dry squeaking voices. They were like two old women in a dark little house; they were always together, and whenever they were troubled, they talked. Squeak, squeak, squeak, while the rain from the Atlantic fell in the valley, and the wind shrilled in the

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thorn brake, and cried *Who? Who?* in the cracks of a pollard willow where Ie, the treecreeper, had a nest of twigs and fibres and feathers. The willow wands growing out of the top with ferns were thrown about; the gate in the corner of the field was shaken. In a lull the creak of pines and the leaf-murmur of oaks growing on the opposite hillside came with the rush of the stream below the wood. Sipsitew slept again, with drops of rain on her back unfelt, for she was warmed by the air-layer between feathers and skin.

The next noise to wake her was a sharp snapping *clenk* coming before a puny screaming which choked itself silent in the throat of that which had screamed. Immediately from the earth under her came the sound of feet thumped in alarmed impotence. She was accustomed to these small cries, and slept again.

An hour before dawn the valley was quieter, a dwindling wind followed the grey clouds, and the stars shone above the cornfield. There were other noises which the willow wren heard: rats running in the wheat, sniffing and searching for food; the movements of worms—those soil-makers moving in their galleries and pushing out their heads to seize and draw underground rotting leaf and sapless stalk; and once Swagdagger the stoat sneezing. White owls winnowed down the hedge, sinking to catch mice, and the brown owl hooted as he flew from tree to tree in the fir-plantation. Higher up the hedge Bloody Bill

Brock the badger with his black bearlike claws was pulling out a nest of rabbits from a hole in the ground, and Old Nog the heron flying to his next fishing post by the stream cried *krark!* harshly. Again the wailing cry and the flapping of wings. Across the valley a scream seemed to answer, and to bound back again to a point fifty yards away from the place of flapping and the clanking of iron, thence to rebound all the way up the bank of earth and stone and to jump into the distance. At many points on the starlit darkness of earth were awakenings from the stupor of pain which had thickened their faculties, and struggles were renewed, while leg-bones grated at the fractures. One by one the cries were choked by the grassy froth in throat and windpipe.

The darkness lagged, the old cries became feeble, they ceased entirely, but new ones arose, and when dawn came in the east many rabbits were in the gins set by man. There was also a hedgehog, and two rats; and by the thistle, held by its yellow legs which the iron teeth of the trap had broken just below the knees was a dark-brown bird. Her wings spanned four feet. She was Wheoo the buzzard hawk of Spreycombe Wood. She sprawled in the corn beside the ungrown spear-thistle, the twelve feathers of her tail spread like a fan. They were dead-leaf colour, barred with lighter shades, and dull white at the tips. There were yellow rings round the pupils of the eyes, and yellow skin above her eyelids and at the base

of her hooked beak, which was open. Wheeoo heaved in thick breathing, and had partially disgorged her crop. Since the evening of the day before she had been in the rabbit gin. She lay still as a golden breath came in the sky beyond the eastern end of the wooded valley.

Softly the wind lifted a short feather on her back, the same wind that carried a honey-fly to its joyful laze on the dandelion growing on the pollard willow. It stirred the greyish fur of a doe rabbit with twisted and torn hindleg, crouching in a muddy patch worn by the dance of three legs in the night so dark and terrible. It trembled the five-coloured tapered badger hair fixed in the mud by the print of the bean-shaped pad, or ball, of its foot—Bloody Bill Brock who had dug out and eaten the third litter of the doe.

Warmed by the beams of the sun the air fled upwards to buoy the breast of a lark singing in the sky. A quarter of a mile away a bird was soaring above the valley. *Wheooo* he cried, and again *Wheooo*. His mate had not been near the eyrie in the pine-tree when he had flown there before sunrise, and he was lonely. He passed over the field of growing corn where the rabbits were bunched in the gins. He saw a movement. With wings upheld above him, with clawed feet hanging and head bent to gaze below, he drifted in a slow slant down the sky. At four hundred feet he hung in the wind, with wings arched and bent backwards. His eyes stared at

the thing in the corn. *Whee-oo, Whee-oo, Whee-ee-oo*, he cried, each cry ending in a wistful downstroke of sound.

He dropped to twenty feet, flapping heavily. Three birds were perched near his mate, a pair of jackdaws, and a magpie. They flew three yards away, and sat uneasily on the thorn bushes, where a chaffinch, three titmice, and a wren were scolding her. The buzzard flew round her, afraid to alight on the ground.

For many minutes he swept and circled above his mate, beating his wings like an owl, uneasily and clumsily. The three magpies often chattered, and the daws called *jank, jank*. A bird with a white patch on its rump heard the noises in the near fir-plantation, and with loping flight came over to see what the cries meant. Seeing the buzzard, he raised his crest and made a noise like the tearing of linen. This noise brought three other jays, which screamed continually at the trapped hawk. One of the pies saw a rabbit in a gin, and fluttered to it, but did not touch it, though its eyes were so large and round in its head. The pie had the cunning of her tribe, and dared not go near the gin.

Krok-krok-rr sounded in the sky, and the jays, the daws, and the pies—all the crow family—looked up. Scarl the Baseborn, the carrion crow, sidled and scrambled down to join them. He was an old and persistent enemy of the buzzards of Spreycombe Wood. He gloated on the sight of

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the fallen hawk, who made no sign that she had heard the cry of mate or enemy.

Scarl flopped from the bank and hopped to her. The buzzard cried as he rushed at him. Scarl got out of his way, cawing harshly. They fought in the air, hawk trying to grasp with yellow feet, and crow endeavouring to remain above and to peck with his beak. While they were fighting, the daws and the pies walked nearer to the luscious thing they had seen in the corn by the hen buzzard's tail.

But, solemn and slow in the height of the sky, came a deep-throated *Krr-r-r-r-ronk*. The fighting birds fell apart. Lazily the croaker floated above the field, and in his own unhurried time, came down, rolling and tumbling sideways on his big black wings. The buzzard went up to meet him, but the new-comer merely moved to one side and continued his rolling fall. When the hawk spread his taloned feet and rushed down, the stranger turned over and looked at him. He glanced up his beak, which was black, very thick at the base, and which ended in a point that had split many skulls of animals. For he was Kronk the raven, the King of the Crows, and therefore of all birds, and so old that he had pecked out the eyes of things hung in chains at Windwhistle Cross, things that once had been called blackguards by rich men, because they had stolen sheep for their starving children. Kronk's beak-glance was enough, the buzzard rolled out of his way.

Kronk landed, and perched on his right leg. Between the second and third toe of his left leg was a scaly piece of skin, which during his flight from the headland had been irritating him. Many times he had tried to pull it off with his beak, thrusting his head between his shanks to do so, and tumbling in the air. Now that he was on land he remembered it, and stretching out his left leg he snipped it off, and afterwards he cleaned his claws. His attitude was one of absolute indifference to the buzzard flapping and mewing round his head, to the inquisitive hoppings of daw and jay, the tail-dipping magpie, and the ragamuffin crow on the thorn. He eyed each toe, turning his foot first one way, then another. Satisfied, he lowered his leg, shook himself, but stopped the feather-shake to look pointedly at the buzzard. The look was accompanied by a stab of his beak at the hawk, for the miserable bird had swooped down to attack him with its claws. Again the buzzard checked in time.

Kronk shook his malodiferous feathers, with a sudden bounding hop he arrived behind the spread-winged hen buzzard, desiring to take that which had been coveted by the others. Thereupon Wheeoo rose up in a fury of flapping and reared backwards, dragging the gin and chain, which held her by the silver-purple sinews. She tried to strike the face of Kronk with her feet, but her legs were held by three and a half pounds of

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steel and iron pegged to the ground. Kronk opened his beak to seize what had attracted him from the air—but the magpie chattered a new cry. At once Kronk turned. Scarl the crow slipped thief-like off the thorn, and vanished below the bank. Daw and jay and pie flew up and away. The buzzard beat heavily into the air. Kronk muttered in his throat a noise like *blar-r-st*, and hopped down the slope of the field to get the wind under his wings.

A man was coming down beside the bank, walking with a slight roll. He was the trapper, a pensioned A.B. from the Royal Navy who purchased the trapping rights of the farm by giving free to the farmer his services as a labourer for six weeks every year. He carried a sack, in which were gins, a hammer, and dead rabbits taken that morning. A sieve was tied to the leather belt he wore round his middle. He was turning a quid of tobacco in his cheek, for he was unmarried.

Coming to a sprung gin, he threw off the sack from his shoulder. He squirted brown saliva from his pursed lips, and seized the head of the animal in his left hand. With the sole of his right foot he depressed the steel spring, so that the jaws fell open. He lifted the rabbit free, and when the pressure of his foot was removed, the teeth of the gin snapped up again. The rabbit kicked and shuddered, but clasping hindfeet in one hand and head in the other, he wristed, or

broke with a twisting pull, the animal's neck. One more article of food for the market where women went to buy food. He tilled the gin before another hole, hammering the iron peg into the ground, and setting the jaws by contracting the spring with the powerful thumb and fingers of his right hand, and fitting the tag of the tongue into the notch of the catch with his left. Carefully he laid it on the earth outside the bury, and shoveling earth into the sieve, he scattered it over the gin, which soon was hidden under the damp dark soil, ready for the step of another rabbit.

He passed down the bank, coming over a slight rise, and immediately he saw a raven and other birds fly up from the corner of the field. He swore, because usually the presence of any of the Crow family meant a mangled rabbit, with battered head and broken entrails. He did not see the crow, as Scarl the Baseborn was too cunning to allow himself to be seen, because he did not want to be detected as the bird who had picked out the eyes of more than two score and ten rabbits.

When the trapper came to the gin he had tilled in the open, (which was an unlawful act, but he had set four traps there to catch a rabbit-stealing badger whose regular nightly path had lain that way) he was surprised to see a buzzard caught by both legs. There was an egg beside her in the corn, and he knew thereby that it was a hen bird, whose nest in the wood he had been observing

with an idea of taking a young bird for a pet. He stared at it for some time, wondering what to do, whether to hit the bird on the head with a stick, or to take it and tame it. He decided to tame it. When he went near the bird, she rose up and tried to rend his tattooed hand.

"Steady on, old gal" he said, "or I shall have to dot you one. No, I don't want yer egg, I've had me breakfast."

The bird made it impossible for him to release her with his hands, so he emptied the sack and threw it over her, first removing the egg. He squeezed the spring, taking the yellow legs out of the open teeth. She flapped so violently that she escaped, leaving the sack in his other hand.

"Sink me sideways!" he exclaimed, gazing at her as she flew away in unsteady flight, her legs hanging loosely. He rolled the quid twice with his tongue, and screwing up his lips, spat silently out of the corner of his mouth.

Wheooo flew wildly across the valley, followed by Scarl the Baseborn and the egg-sucking female who skulked through life in his company. This pair of carrion crows pestered every hawk they saw (except Chakchek the Backbreaker) because they had a nest of young crows half a mile away in a holly tree, and because they were impudent, quarrelsome, and faithful by nature. Wheooo did not try to avoid them as usual, but flew into the wood, where they left her to look for pigeon-squabs, or nestlings, in the larches. She

struck many branches with her wings, often tumbling near the ground. She passed a pine where her nest was, and flew out of the other side of the wood, and over the top of the hill. Her mate saw her from where he was soaring, and called to her, and after flying together for several minutes he persuaded her to return to the eyrie.

The eyrie had been used by buzzards for more than twelve years. It was a dark pile of sticks and rootlets four feet high, and about five feet wide, flat on the top. The base was covered with green moss, and the centre of it was damp and rotten. Below the pile, hidden by cowflops (which some call foxgloves) was an ancient barrow, or grave, where the bones of thousands of rats and moles and rabbits were crumbling. There were grass-snake skins as well, the hollow teeth of vipers, and the skulls of kittens.

Three weeks before Wheeoo had jumped on the pile with a cowflop in her beak, the buds of whose flowers were not then turned pink. She had brought during the days that followed several larch twigs, some sheeps-wool, and a piece of paper. Thus was Buzzard Castle set in order and repair for the season's residence. The first egg was heavily blotched with brown, the markings of the second were lighter, and the last egg of her clutch, which was laid on a thistle in the cornfield, was marked hardly at all on its rough grey-white surface.

Now she fell on her nest, with spread wings,

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when she tried to alight on the branch above it, and lay on her breastbone. She did not understand why she was unable to perch. For a while she lay and panted, while her mate watched her from above.

A moment later he saw her settle to brood on the two eggs, and she remained in the nest until past noon, when she roused herself off the nest with the elbows of her wings, and dived into the air below. The eyrie was built on a flat bough and against two vertical branches so firmly that not even the most violent winter gales had shifted it. It was thirty feet from the steep slope immediately below, and after falling thirteen feet the weight of her body was less than the resistance on her wings, and she glided. Then out of the trees she soared unsteadily in the valley breezes, and began to rise to her mate. She was hungry, and in flat spirals they passed away from the valley, coming to the heather hill where rabbits and pippits had their homes.

They hovered a hundred yards apart, hanging head to wind, with wings bent back. At once Wheeoo observed a movement, and slid lower to scrutinise it. A baby rabbit was nibbling the grass. She dropped to it, and clutched. It ran away, and flying after it, she clutched again. Her feet, clenched in a stiffening bunch, did not obey her brain, and so her prey escaped. The reason was beyond her intelligence.

When her mate caught a rat she flew to where he

was standing with it on a lichened stone, and cried for food, as she had cried when a nestling. With one stroke of his hooked beak he ripped it open from head to tail, and pulled it to pieces, swallowing the head and larger portions himself, and appeasing her screams with smaller bits and entrails. He also gave her the tail, which she refused, but she ate the feet gladly.

Wheoo did not languish and die in the days that followed, as she might have done in a different season, because the desire to brood was more intense than personal anguish. Fifteen and a half of the seventeen hours of light were spent on the eggs. She became skilful in alighting on the edge of the eyrie, standing upright on the stumps (which gave her pain) and falling on the tips of her wings, which she drew in to elbow herself forward. Her mate fed her, bringing his prey to the pine tree and tearing it up for her. Mice and small birds she swallowed whole. He also brought her beetles and wood lice, snakes and moles. Once he saw an adder basking on a hot stone, and grasped it by the head. It lashed with its tail so violently that he flew high into the sky, where Scarl the Baseborn saw and pursued him. The viper swung him out of his steadiness, for it was more than two feet long. *Wheoo* wailed the hawk. *Krok-k-kr* chuckled the carrion crow, pestering at his tail and trying to pull out his feathers. The hawk suddenly dropped the snake when Scarl was below him, so that it fell across his

wings and made him skwark with fear. It did not bite him, but such was Scarl's nature that he dived away, and in silence flew back to his holly tree.

The mate of Wheeoo did not heed the viper, which whizzed into the yellow blooms of a gorse bush and died in the sun it loved. He soared till he was hardly to be seen by the trapper watching him from the window of a cottage in the clearing of a larch plantation over the heather hill. But the bird could see the Wyandottes at the edge of the clearing scratching the earth; he saw even the head movement of a crowing cock. He wheeled above before drifting away to the down by the sea, descending to perch on a wall. The wall was made of shillets of rock and earth, and stonecrop grew with cowflops on the side away from the sea wind. Only green and black and orange lichens, that thrive where others perish, grew on the western side.

The wall, which was crumbling, had been built by a farmer to keep away brake ferns, brambles, and heather from spreading to the field. Oats were sown there, but they were choked with spur-rey and nettle, ragwort, tansy, and dock. Many rabbits, dwellers in the wall, nibbled the corn. They did so much damage that gins were tilled throughout the year, for every young doe on an average had thirty offspring a year. All the does were young, for none lived to be old. And when the buzzard sailed back to Spreycombe wood

ten minutes later, there was one less to spoil the food of man. The hawk had waited until it came out of its hole, and gripped it in its talons. That night Swagdagger the stoat found six baby rabbits growing cold in a grassy nest in the wall, and slew them with six bites.

II

Six weeks later, when the second egg was hatched in Buzzard Castle, Wheeoo glided down to the clearing to catch a chicken. She still tried to hunt. The dried bundles of her feet clicked together as she flew. Every hen cried out to her chicks that an enemy was coming, and scores of little chickens ran to cover, and crouched still. Rose-comb, a broody Wyandotte, puffed out her feathers and almost filled the barred entrance to the coop in her rage of clucking. She was the more rageful and alarmed because one of her thirteen eggs was well on the way to hatching. She had been listening to its cheeping all that morning and afternoon. It was an egg larger and more rotund than any of the other dozen eggs of her sitting. Within was Mewliboy, rather hot with chipping a ring round the large end of the shell with the horn on his upper mandible.

It is not known how or why Mewliboy came to be in that shell, even the sun does not know. All

that is known is that his mother laid the makings of him in the corn, covered by a shell: that the trapper had put the egg under a hen: that great heat passed from her body through the shell: that two dark specks came in the albumen, and to the specks came red lines, which were linked blood-vessels breathing air that came through the pores of the shell, and that these joining up with others had slowly threaded their way beside wings and lungs and heart and neck, making the shape and form of a reptile, which had been the shape of Mewliboy's ancestors ages and ages ago, before feathers were known. After three weeks the hens' eggs hatched, so the trapper put the egg, with Mewliboy still growing, under a hen with a later sitting, and she was called Rose-comb.

The reptile shape changed into a bird, with legs trussed up over its shoulders, and the two dark specks grew larger, for they were the eyes of Mewliboy. In the weeks of incubation he passed from developement to developement, and changes within that round egg happened in a day that had happened to his ancestors only after a thousand generations on the round earth. He burst into the air-space of his cell, and mewed—tens of thousands of years in swamp and jungle had passed away before a voice had come into his family. From a glairy liquid and a yoke bag Mewliboy had appeared, and this was rather clever of the Quill Spirit, aided by the Star-dwarf some call the Sun.

Mewliboy's adventures started early. When he had cracked his shell, he drew his first real breath, which made him so tired that he went to sleep, digesting the last of the yoke in the bag, which in future was to serve him as a belly. He was soon strengthened, and with a last heave and wriggle broke the shell. The top he pushed away from his pate, and the other he sat in, and went to sleep again, his head lolling over the rim.

It was not very long before he woke and pushed it up, opening his beak. This exhausted him so much that he sank into the shell and rested. After a little slumber he awoke and waggled an open beak more persistently, touching the white under-feathers of his foster-mother. While he mewed, Rose-comb sat unmoving. Mewliboy collapsed for another sleep.

When he awoke from his nap he demanded food once again. Rose-comb sat still, but his wagging head tickled her so persistently that she rose off the eggs and examined some broken meal for him to eat. She picked up pieces in her beak and dropped them again, which was to tell him to eat. Mewliboy continued to wag his head and to mew, but became so tired that he suddenly sagged, and slept.

He was next awakened by the angry Rose-comb, who was pecking a tattooed hand thrust under the lifted door of the coop.

"Nah then, less of it, old gal," he said good-naturedly. "It ain't one of your Wyndicotts, and

a nawk can't feed itself even if you was to cluck your head off with instrootions."

Mewliboy was almost naked, his eyelids were gummed together, and his belly was a lovely yellow like a waistcoat that had slipped down. The trapper took him indoors and fed him on tiny pieces of rabbit flesh. He put him in a woollen glove, but the baby got slowly colder. The glove was laid on the settle by the fire, while he brewed a pot of tea and boiled an egg for himself. Afterwards he tried to feed Mewliboy but the baby would not lift up its head.

"Sink me sideways if you aint goin' west", he muttered, and a few minutes later set out to walk over the hill. He crossed the valley and the stream, and trudged to the eyrie in the pine-tree, which he knew was not forsaken because he had watched the old birds soaring above it. Wheeoo slipped off the nest when he was underneath it, and he heard the clicking noises of her withered swinging feet.

The tree was not easy to swarm, since the bark was smooth and the bole was two feet thick. He gathered a number of rotten branches and made a heap against the higher side, but it was no help. He spat resolutely and took off his coat; rolled his two shirtsleeves—thus removing the only clothing they possessed from the figures of two fat blue women holding the White Ensign above their heads—put Mewliboy under his hat, and began to swarm up with hands and knees.

While he was climbing, the cock buzzard and Wheeoo, whose weight was diminished by a third since her agony, glided and flapped in the windless valley, not daring to venture near. The old A.B. reached the fork twenty feet above the ground, where he rested.

From the fork a round reddish branch curved outwards and upwards, and it was upon a lesser branch growing horizontally from this one that Buzzard Castle had been founded and raised. The trapper swarmed up, and straddled across the foundation branch, and squirted luxuriously on to the whitened cowflops below. He found the torn body of a rabbit in the vast nest, with many rats tails, shards of beetles, and cast up pellets of indigestible bones and fur.

Sleeping on each other in the slight depression in the centre were two nestlings. He removed his hat and tumbled out a lukewarm Mewliboy, and to recognise him again, he nipped off the claw of the middle toe of his right foot. Afterwards he turned him over and tickled his yellow tummy, and then leaned far across and dropped him on the other two, who awoke and waved their open beaks for food.

Wheeoo flew back a quarter of an hour after she had watched the trapper leave the wood. She had learnt to pick up beetles in her beak, hovering, when the wind was strong enough, to find them. The feathers on her breastbone were gone from the skin, which was sore and bare, as

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were the elbow joints of her wings from continuous use in thrusting the body forward.

The white down on Mewliboy's body grew very fluffy, and at the end of a week many joints of rat and vole and rabbit had made him three times as heavy as he had been in the trapper's palm. He began to explore the eyrie, and to have fights with his two sisters for the prey which his father brought and tore up.

His father was worried because he could not secure enough food for mate and nestlings. Wheeoo brought the few beetles and lizards she caught to her young ones, but her instincts of feeding them before herself did not extend to the prey brought by her mate, and whenever he came to the eyrie when she was there, Wheeoo behaved like a fourth nestling, and, being the strongest, usually managed to get most of the mouthfuls. So he flew to Buckland Wood, some miles away, where lived Jale, the young hen buzzard without nest or mate, and brought her back to hunt for his children.

She came and stared at them, and then flapped away to soar above the heather hill. From the very moment of her arrival she adopted Wheeoo and the nestlings, bringing many snakes for them while the father passed most of the day soaring in the sky. She fed Wheeoo, who followed her wherever she went, mewling to her as though Jale were her mother.

When Mewliboy and his sisters were a fort-

night old the eyrie was foul with rotting bones and rats tails. At three weeks most of the feathers had come, and only a little down remained. They were more quarrelsome than ever, and the dozens of flies that buzzed about the eyrie helped to make them savage. Once when Scarl the Base-born was bold enough to fly to the eyrie, Mewliboy struck at him with a foot and drove him away. The carrion crow was half the weight of the young buzzard.

Sometimes Jale brought a spray of beech-leaves in her mouth to decorate the nest, but the young ones snatched it from her and tugged away among themselves until they realised that it was not good to eat.

When Mewliboy was a month old there were not many places on the eyrie-branch that he and his sisters had not perched upon. Wheeoo could not perch, and so she had to remain in Buzzard Castle, amid the tormenting flies, until she could bear them no more, and sailed away in the valley, calling the children to follow her. They were afraid, and told her so with wailing voices. Jale also called them, and ceased to bring food to them.

One afternoon came when they had had no food since the previous evening. Mewliboy was so famished that he forgot his fear for a moment, and flapped off his perch. At once fear returned, and with a cry to Wheeoo—whom he loved more than Jale or his father—he fell.

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The dreaded ground rushed upon him, and he felt much the same as one of his ancestors had felt when first it had flown. He clutched an oak sapling, clinging with his feet upside down for many minutes, and when he let go he fell into the cowflops, safe but frightened. He slept there.

Another night he slept by himself fifty yards away from Buzzard Castle, on a low branch of a beech tree beside the stream, to which he had hopped and walked and flapped and scrambled. He awoke at dawn, and mewed for Wheeoo, but the jays discovered him and returned, hour after hour, to annoy him.

When he could bear the hunger and thirst no longer he launched himself off the branch. He was in an agony of fear, but he flew. The ground and trees passed below and beside him in a curious way. A feeling of the wildest joy pushed away the fear in his breast when he held his wings still and glided. He turned, but lost flying speed and fell: quick beats of his wings brought him up again. He flew over the brook and a fence of wire-netting, clogged with beech leaves, erected on the farther side to prevent rabbits from ruining the field.

There was a white house among the trees across the valley, and towards this he flew, why, he did not know. Every beat took him farther from Buzzard Castle, and although he was frightened, he flew on, not daring to do anything

else. He opened his beak to mew to Wheeco, but he had no voice.

Mewliboy flew on. He dared not turn or alight on the ground. He flew straight into the house, no more able to stop than the wall was able to move. And Mewliboy being the lesser in bulk, stopped. He fell stunned to a flower-bed below, to the amazement of a gardener, who was carefully replanting for the fifth time a root of jasmine, dug up by Dabster the puppy hound, who, hidden behind a rhododendron bush, was watching for him to go away, so that he might dig it up again.

But when Mewliboy tumbled beside the gardener, Dabster was so alarmed that he ran away to the stable buildings, where he ate the food of the ducks who had waddled to cover when they saw Wheeco soaring above, crying for Mewliboy.

The gardener was a friend of the trapper, who had told him about the bird he had found in the trap, and the hatching of the egg under Rose-comb, and how he had nipped off a claw in order to recognise the bird again when he should return to take it. Only that morning he had heard the cries of the young birds when he visited his gins, and had determined to climb the eyrie in the evening after work. When he came to the kitchen for his dinner at one o'clock (for in addition to his trapping he looked after the electric light plant in the engine-room beside the

coach-house) he was met by the gardener who with many mysterious nods and winks took him to his potting shed and pointed silently to a box with a big log on top of it. On being invited to look underneath, the trapper saw the buzzard: and throughout dinner (which he ate most skilfully off the end of his knife, without once cutting his mouth) the gardener gave him an infinite number of unvaried accounts of Mewliboy's arrival, and how he had kicked and bit and clutched and flapped, while one of the old birds called for him in the sky.

So Mewliboy was taken to the trapper's cottage again, and put in an open-air cage of wire-netting and boxes, against the eastern wall, with the branch of a tree inside to perch upon. For food he was given the young rabbits which were too small for the market. At night the cage was covered with sacks.

§ Rose-comb, sedately clucking and scratching with ten white chicks, saw him one morning, and rushed away most hurriedly. Mewliboy, of course, did not recognise her, and she could not possibly have known that the terrible enemy hitting the wire-meshes with its wings was the thing to whose cheeping within the shell she had listened so gladly.

Mewliboy was given rats to eat, and in the manner of the buzzards he ripped them open with one stroke of his hooked beak. The tips of his flight feathers became broken by constant

beating in so small a space. He tried to break the wire, to push his head through a mesh; hundreds of times every day he cried *Wheooo, Wheooo*. At the end of a week he was still trying to escape. In the valley the other buzzards were soaring every evening, often in tiers, the cock bird highest of all. Whenever Mewliboy heard them calling to one another, he would beat his wings to be free, and wail again, desperately, *Wheooo, Whee-ee-i-oo*.

The trapper never forgot to feed him, and Mewliboy lost his fear of the human. Week after week of lovely midsummer weather passed away, and still Spreycombe wood was the home of Wheooo and the others. Jale remained with them, and fed her, but neither the cock-bird nor her daughters would give her of their catch.

Indeed, the two young hen-buzzards had always been ferocious and savage to her, even in the nest, except when their crops were full. At least once a day Wheooo came down the valley alone and called Mewliboy and always he answered. Once he was looking through the front of his cage at a covey of partridges flying downhill about a hundred yards away. He began to hop and cry in tremendous excitement, for looking upwards he had perceived a speck of a bird sweeping down faster than anything he had ever seen.

Distinctly he heard the hiss of wind in its

closed wings, and it was slanting down at such a rate upon the partridges that they seemed not to be moving: and their speed was forty-eight miles an hour. *Wheooo, Wheooo*, cried Mewliboy, as Chakchek the Backbreaker (a remote cousin of his) swooped in a steep curve like the blade of a reaping hook, which was the shape of his talons.

Mewliboy heard the thud of the peregrine falcon striking the partridge, saw its head fall, watched The Backbreaker clutch its body and climb steeply with it to fly to Bone Ledge on the precipice where the land broke and the sea moved. Still watching with his head pressed against the meshes Mewliboy heard a deep *kronk, kronk, kronk* remote in the sky, for the raven was calling his wife, with whom he had come inland when he had observed Chakchek flying towards the mainland. For half a century Kronk and his wife (who had been born and brought up in a Highland deer forest) had waited above the return raiding-route of the Chakcheks patrolling at five thousand feet. Mewliboy saw them descending upon The Backbreaker from opposite directions; he saw Kronk diving at the falcon and watched the body of the partridge falling and the dive of the hen raven to take it in her beak. Then Kronk harried the falcon, offering him his beak to fall upon whenever the peregrine stooped, but The Backbreaker swerved and swooped upon the other raven. With a cry

of *Sc-o-t-t-ch* she dropped the partridge, and rolled to impale the falcon.

When The Backbreaker plunged again to seize it, Kronk had got it. Abruptly the falcon broke off the fight and climbed to eight thousand feet, to sweep away in a south-easterly direction. He had seen the pigeons flying above the town by the tidal river nine miles away.

Mewliboy tried desperately to break his cage every day, but the summer went slowly without freedom for him. Never a day went by without Wheeoo calling to him, but she dared not come down. Then came a time when the days were as long as the nights, and the leaves of the trees were torn away by the gales which rushed up and over the valley.

One of his sisters was shot by a gamekeeper, and the other was driven away by Jale. She and the cock bird went inland and Wheeoo was left to fend for herself. She had learnt to walk a few steps on the stumps of her legs, from which the useless feet were fallen, but she could catch nothing except lizards and beetles on the ground, and these were hard to find, now that summer was ended.

She tried to tear rabbits in the gins, but without feet to hold them she could get hardly a mouthful. She became thin and bedraggled, like the corpse of her daughter nailed to the keeper's gibbet, and called so plaintively that one morning the trapper, making up his mind

simultaneously with a large ejection of tobacco-juice, released Mewliboy with the remark, "Sink me sideways, if I don't believe it's yer old Ma a-calling yer for to feed her." So Mewliboy flew up, crying *Whee-i-oo!* in his joy. He came back later for food, and the delighted man threw him a rabbit, which he bore away. For days he returned, and since Wheeoo became stronger and less bedraggled he must have fed her.

The gales blew themselves out, and as the sun went down like fire beyond the valley, the ex-sailor used to stand on his threshold and watch mother and son rise from their feeding, and beat into the sunset wind that flowed over the valley. In the airs below the trees their wings seemed clumsy and heavy, and often when they stopped beating them, and attempted to glide, they seemed clogged with earth and were a graceless support to the body. Slowly they flapped upwards, until they broke through the stagnant airs and reached the soft south wind stroking the tops of the pines and the oaks. A wild and plaintive *Wheooo* fell from Mewliboy's beak. The wind buoyed his breast, his wings lifted him. At the southern end of each loop he turned into the wind and pressed against it, flapping broad pinions, and his white-barred underside was lit by the light of the sun breaking into the sea. He beat the air three or four times at the turn, then went with the wind. When

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he had gained soaring speed he wheeled at a steep angle to face the south, and was borne up easily to a higher plane.

He glided with Wheeoo while an unearthly air took them up, up, up, serenely as they traced their wingèd arcs. *Wheooo!* cried Mewliboy, from three thousand feet, and joyfully she answered. Sipsitew the willow wren, with his mate and children, heard them as the little birds took their last beakfuls of water from the stream, before setting out for their winter home in Africa.

Wheooo! Wheooo! Wheooo!—high and unseen, until the western fire died, and the fields grew dark as the woods, and the star of all the falcons flickered gold wings as it flew in eternal watchfulness.

THE TRAPPER'S MATES

For generations the jackdaws that goister round the battlements of d'Essantville Castle have watched hounds leaving kennels four days a week in soft weather from November to April. The little viscounts of the House are blooded almost before they can walk; and they can ride long before they have learnt to talk (alternatively with the beautiful West Country dialect) the peculiar slang, which, changing with every generation, is curiously called King's English; and they die before they learn to spell, but that is nothing to do with the way they hunt the fox. The first thing a future Master learns after his personal servant has buttoned the fawn-coloured cloth gaiters up his baby legs, and set him in the wicker basket-chair on the back of a Shetland pony, is that the fox is hunted *as a gentleman*.

The term is both actual and metaphorical. The fox is permitted to live during eight months of the year under the patronage of the great landowner. Any extravagances of taste which would bring an ordinary man before the magistrates—such as the killing of another man's hens—is tolerated. The fox's gentlemen friends will pay the cost, and he goes free. Like all gentlemen, however, he has his obligations.

Certain things are expected of him. He must show sport when called upon by his Lordship's huntsman to do so any time during the daylight, Sundays and Christmas Day excepted, between the beginning of November and the end of March. If, after a long hard chase, he can run no more, but grows stiff, so that hounds catch him and break him up, he is a "good fox". If he skulks in woods, if he won't run, if he hides behind badgers in the deep earths, or otherwise tries to survive, he is a "bad fox".

But what can be said of a fox who behaved as though the Hunt existed only for his own pleasure. A fox who, if a meet was fixed at Lashingcot Brake, would probably be there; as he attended the meets at Doves Moor, Skilgate, Five Cross Ways, Smoky House, Hibbert's Folly, and Hanging Woman Spinney? That is what the bobtailed fox was wont to do. Naturally, he had a right to be in those places, and at any time, the Hunt Secretary told me, after my first day's hunting with the d'Essantville pack; but this fox had the damned impertinence to appear when another fox was being chased, and deliberately to draw hounds—unless the whipper-in happened to be well up with them—after himself. And when this fox had had, apparently, all the selfish enjoyment he wanted, he disappeared. Time after time he spoiled the huntin', declared the Secretary, interfering with the hounds' legitimate desire for blood,

leading them after himself, and vanishing at a certain field, just inside the western boundary of the d'Essantville country, called Cockabells. There was a League for the Prohibition of Cruel Huntin', Fishin' and Shootin', but what about one for the Prevention of Cruelty to Hounds which needed Blood, what?

I concluded that the Secretary placed me among what he despised as the "sentimentalising public", and that his light humour was as a kindness to one who had been publicly roared at by the Master.

You may imagine how this fox interested me. How could he know when the hounds were meeting at these places? I spoke to many people about him. To some followers, particularly among the young and unworldly-wise, I gathered that he was a creature of charm and mystery, whose continued existence was regarded with affection and delight; to others, he was a bore and a nuisance, to be gotten rid of as quickly as possible—in the only way in which a fox should die, it must be understood. The reader may be able to decide which of the two types possesses the better mind for the governing of our great people. And if this makes you snort (as his Lordship snorted at me) the snort is your answer, and you will be unable to enjoy the story of this extraordinary fox, whose early history I learned after the first time I hunted him, when I was reclining, as flat as I could get, in an arm-chair

in the parlour of an inn called *The Moon in the Mere*.

It was my third glass of bullace wine, and it appeared to me then to be the funniest thing I had seen, the wrath and snort on the Master's face because I had said that surely the fox deserved his life after such a fine run. Outside the winter sky was dull, before me a fire of beech logs burned, warming the soles of my boots from which ruddy steam arose as the mud dried on spur and leather. Delightful to stretch one's legs after the chase, holding one's fourth glass of bullace wine, while 'baccy smoke strays past the nostrils from the bowl of the old briar pipe held loosely in teeth and resting on crumpled stock. Blackie in stall wisped and feeding, a ten mile hack home in the dark, a bath, change, and food afterwards. Lolling in the chair I watched the sluggish ruby flame flickering in my bullace wine—I swear that the best sloe-gin in the West Country is made by the landlord of *The Moon in the Mere*.

I was about to call for another glass when a man entered, and sat heavily on the settle, after bidding me good-evening. Seeing my kit, he asked me if I had been out with his Lordship's hounds. I recognised him as a pig-farmer, a member of the Long White Lop-eared Pig Society, and a prizewinner at the last show. He was a big red-faced man, jovial like one of his clean beasts, of whom he was very fond and proud. I had noticed him during the run that

morning, for he rode a piebald gelding 17 hands high that carried him with magnificent ease. "And I'm no ladybird neither, am I?" And he confessed, after a sorrowful tipping of the pewter pot, that he rode at 'twelve score'—two hundred and forty pounds. "Too much, too much", he sighed. "But they say a man takes after the things he has most to do with. Ah, well. Landlord, another pint for me, and a pint for this gentleman."

"Yes, sir, I'll bring a lamp in a moment, gentlemen."

I asked the farmer if he knew why the fox had a tag instead of a brush. Perhaps he had been caught in a trap?

"No, it wasn't a trap", he said, leaning forward to stare at one of his boots. The girth of the leg seemed to depress him. He tapped it with the handle of his whip.

"Chopped off by a hound?" I suggested, when I had allowed him enough time to consider his enormous calf.

"No, one of my boars bit it off when he was a cub. He disappeared afterwards."

The grandfather clock ticked on. The drinks were brought, and when we had proposed and drunk each other's health, I ventured to ask him more questions; and he told me the circumstances of the cub's birth, and its early life history; and the pictures which his facts made in my mind, I will try and make in words, as now follow.

Bobtail's mother was the littlest vixen that ever leapt from shelf to shelf in the disused apple-cellar of George Cog, the gamekeeper. Indeed, she was so small that she was able to hide up the flue when they came to bag the foxes.

The country of the d'Essantville Hunt had many deep earths, both of badger and fox. When hounds drew the thick North Side wood there was never a screaming *Gone Away!* The foxes knew too much to break covert. They slunk about the wood, dozens of them. They preyed on the game birds in the coverts to such an extent that it was necessary to destroy them. Many were shot and trapped by George Cog, but more ran free; and the hunt agent made a bargain with the keeper, which was that he would pay the keeper half a guinea for every runnable fox or vixen dug out and handed over to him.

In turn the keeper made a bargain with Tom Cockerlegg, an elderly unmarried man who earned his living by wiring and trapping rabbits in the winter, the right of which he bought from several farmers by working for them in the summer without wages. Tom Cockerlegg agreed to receive from the keeper five shillings for every uninjured fox or vixen brought to the apple cellar by the cottage in the wood.

There are hunting men in the d'Essantville country, and his lordship is one of the most emphatic, who declare that a fox has no sense of fear, because its limited intelligence cannot

formulate the idea of death: that the terror of annihilation, of ceasing to be, is unknown by animals. But there are many fears, and the greatest fear of a wild animal is when it is trapped or caged. One evening there were nine foxes in the confined darkness of the apple cellar. All night they sat on their haunches with restless sweeping of brushes, leaping upon the mildewed shelves, pacing the floor of trodden earth and cowdung. The smallest noise from outside quieted every movement. Ears were cocked, brushes stilled, breathing ceased, noses quivered. In one corner sat Fang-over-lip, a dog-fox with points of long upper canines showing over closed mouth. He was the most cunning fox in the West Country, the most experienced, and therefore he felt fear more than the others.

When footfalls of men sounded afar, he sprang up and leapt on the lowest shelf. A key was put into the padlock, and turned. The lock was lifted off the staple, the door opened a few inches, and the keeper looked in.

The rank taint of warm foxes, like hops drying in an outhouse, made him spit. Behind him stood Tom Cockerlegg, the trapper, with lantern, sacks, string, and thorning glooves. Cockerlegg spoke to a grey sheep-dog, his constant companion. "Lie down, you." She sat down outside, obediently. Both men entered, and shut the door. The eye-pupils of the foxes were pale green slits glowing in the lantern light. Lips writhed back

from teeth in silent snarls. They waited. Neither of the men lost his stolidity. While George Cog held the lantern and a sack Tom Cockerlegg grasped the brush of the nearest fox. It struggled and twisted and kicked while it was being pushed and shaken into the sack, which was tied up.

The keeper missed the ninth fox, and peering with the lantern he saw the white tag of her brush up the flue. She had scrambled there in terror. He pulled the brush, but could not shift her. He felt for her leg, lifted the pad off the stonework, and jerked. She yelped, and fell on the floor, trying to bite and lick the pain in the joint which was dislocated. Later in the morning the kennelman drove up with a cart and she was slung up with the others and taken a journey made painful with jolts. The journey ended at the kennels, where several hounds were singing while they waited for the two whippers-in who exercised them in the summer. Soon the corn would be cut in the fields, and woodland cub-hunting begin. The little vixen was only a cub, and she was spared a worry in the dewy morning, for Charlie Tarr gave her to the pig-farmer, who bound and bathed the injured limb, and made it sound again. He tended her with regular care and after a few weeks she grew tame and friendly, answering to the name of Judy. She slept at night in the garden, wearing a dog-collar to which a chain was hooked. During the day he unfastened the chain, and she used to go into the house and

curl up by the fire. Like many countrymen, the farmer rarely listened to the songs of birds wild in their native air, but the twitters of a goldfinch, caught and caged, his property, gave him pleasure. He had one in his sitting-room, and during the many hours that Judy played before the fire, or leapt upon his lap, the bird was filled with terror. The vixen watched it continually, and people coming to see him on business or in friendship were usually treated to the sight of the finch falling off its perch in a temporary paralysis of fright—the sweetest singers are always the most nervous.

It was a green winter that year, and one night in January, as he was getting into bed, the breeder of long white lop-eared pigs heard Judy hooting. The cry was unmistakable. Three barks, higher in tone than a terrier's, sharper, shorter, and joined. He listened again, but it was not repeated, and soon he fell asleep. The next night was lit by the moon, and he heard Judy hooting again. For some minutes he watched at the window, for he had heard the answer of a dog fox. He saw nothing. The next morning he moved the kennel nearer the house, and in the moonlight of the third night a lean grey thing stole down the orchard, and disappeared in the black shadow of an apple tree. This was Fang-over-lip, who sat there a long time. He moved sufficiently to keep the shadow always upon himself. He sat there so long that the farmer grew tired of watching, and went to bed.

Fang-over-lip came soon after owl-light the next night, but he did not linger in any shadows, although the nearness of the house made him uneasy. As he crept nearer his nose sought the smells of danger. He sat outside Judy's kennel, but she would not come out. She lay down in the straw of the kennel, watching him. He suddenly fled, alarmed by the sight of the farmer moving at the window. He must have returned again, for the next morning when the farmer took her a bowl of food, he found plover's feathers in the kennel. Judy slept all that day; and the goldfinch twittered to the birds seen through the window. Early the next night Judy was outside the kennel, and hooting for Fang-over-lip. The farmer did not see him return, but in the morning he found one of his own hen's feet in the kennel.

"The cheek of it. Would you believe it, sir, but that fox had left my fowls alone until the night of his final visit!"

Clicketting time was long past when the daffodils peered in their beauty from the grass under the apple-trees. When the first white wild violets bloomed in the hedge, the farmer took a ferreting spade and dug a hole in the gravel pit in the meadow, and Judy scratched it deeper. One day he took off her dog collar, patted her affectionately, and turned her loose. Two days afterwards she scraped at the kitchen door, and jumped up at him, licking his hand. He knew that she was asking for food, and gave her a basin of porridge,

with cream in it, which she ate hungrily. A cooked rabbit was next given her, she cracked it up, gave him a sly look, and with a sweep of her brush ran back to her cubs in the gravel pit.

Regularly she came for food, and for the first fortnight she returned after a meal. Then she began to loiter and even to curl herself by the fire, watching the goldfinch that could not accustom itself to her bright hard eyes. After the third week she seemed inclined to spend all the day from the cubs, and the farmer had to put her out of doors, bidding her return and nourish them. And one morning while she was eating he saw five cubs sitting in the long grass below the bank, where nettles grew over the wilted white violets. They were dark brown and furry, and their blue eyes peered at their mother. The farmer went slowly to them, and four turned into the nettles, and hid themselves. One remained, and tried to bite the hand that picked him up. It was carried to the scullery, and, given bread-and-milk, it tried to bite that instead of a hand.

Again the next morning the five cubs sat in a row before the nettles, wondering where their mother had gone. When the bold cub saw the farmer, it ran unsteadily to him, and was fed on porridge. On the third morning while the mother and cub were eating, and the pig farmer was inside the house, a lumbering white animal trotted round the corner of the wall, so frightening Judy that she made off. The alarming animal was a boar, and at the scent

of fox it snorted angrily. The cub went into a rabbit hole underneath a holly tree, but the boar bit the bone of his tail as he scrambled down. When the farmer returned the pig was goaded to its sty. Judy did not return that day, and when the next morning she did not come for her breakfast the farmer went to the gravel pit and dug out the earth. "It was empty, sir."

My companion in the fire-comforted parlour of *The Moon in the Mere* had aroused my curiosity about the disappearance of the vixen, when the door opened and a hand came into the room. Then a squeaky voice begged his honour's pardon, and the hand was withdrawn. I saw a single eye beyond it, in the gloom, staring straight like an owl's eye. After a moment the hand returned, an earthy hand, knobbed, raw, and thick. The finger-nail of the index finger was half an inch longer than the others, a repulsive pale length of chipped horn. Then came a felt hat, the band of which was rotted to tatters, and a face. The shaggy hair, the thick eyebrows, and the tangled moustache were like autumn bracken. The man wore a celluloid collar, worn and flaked, but I could see that when new it had been a striped affair of black and white and red lines. The man peered about until the wandering eyes fixed on me, then he squeaked again, "I beg your honour's pardon". I hastened to tell him that we were not having a private talk, and begged him to come by the hearth. He sat on the settle, and fingered a

short clay pipe. His coat was faded to the hues of bark and earth and lichen, so were his trousers. After a wondering scrutiny of my form in the chair he said,

"I beg your honour to excuse me, but have you had good sport, your honour."

"Your friend the bobtailed fox, Tom," replied the farmer. Bracken-brows scowled.

"Wait till I catch that there beggar" he squeaked, staring at the ashes in his pipe bowl. "I'll give he a knock on the head, won't I now?"

He tried to light the ashes in his pipe, and shook his head when the match went out. Promptly he took the tobacco pouch I offered him. Perhaps he was waiting for someone, for he pulled out a large brass watch from his pocket, levered open the back with the nail, and continued to fill his pipe while holding the watch in the same hand.

"This be Tom Cockerlegg," explained the pig-farmer. "He doesn't seem over fond of Bobtail. For why", he added with a chuckle, "I can't imagine."

It was a curious sight, the angry and violent expression in the large hairy weather-roughed face of the trapper contrasted with the puling pipe of the squeaky voice. He stared at me while he declared that Bobtail followed him as he used his long net on windy moonlit nights, less than two hundred yards away. He would hear the cry of a caught rabbit, but before Bess or he could get there, the "varx would have'n out of the net".

"Bess here, her baint no good to catch'n" squeaked the wild man of the rabbit buries, pointing with the horrible nail of his lumpy forefinger. How many tons of earth and iron had the trapper handled?

"Her's runned after un many times".

"Bobtail's too fast without a brush," said the massive member of the Long White Lop-eared Pig Society.

"Darnee, if Bess baint no good, they varx dogs baint no good neither!" retorted Cockerlegg. He began to laugh, an absurd and feeble cackling, while he continued to fill his pipe. It seemed to take him a long time. He saw me looking at it, and returned the pouch promptly. It was half empty, and it had been full. The farmer winked at me, and said,

"What be time, Tom Cockerlegg?"

"It baint closing time yet, midear," replied Tom, and fixed his owlsh eyes on my pint pot.

"Will you have a drink?" I asked, when the watch had gone back into its pocket.

"Thankyouyourhonour," herepliedimmediately, and knocked loudly on the table for the landlord, who came, and returned with a quart of beer, which Tom had ordered almost before the door was opened.

Bess the sheepdog was a beautiful animal. She had long woolly grey hair, a noble head with contemplative eyes. She leaned against the trapper's legs, and he pushed her away with a

hobnailed boot. I patted my knee, but she would not come to me, preferring to sit by the foot that had spurned her. She regarded her master's face with grave and watchful patience.

I wanted to hear what had become of the cub under the holly tree.

"You were saying just now that the earth in the gravel pit was deserted after the scare Judy had from the boar. Did she ever come back for food?"

The pig farmer shook his head.

"What happened to the cubs?"

"They must have died without the mother. Two days afterwards she was found in a gin set by a rat-run in a cornfield. Died of lockjaw. Tom found her, and brought her to me. I've got her stuffed in a glass case: we put it on a table opposite the goldfinch. And you'll hardly believe this, but it's as true as I'm sitting here. The constant sight of a stuffed fox killed my singing bird. It died of fright, did that bird. I was very fond of it, too, as I'd had it from the nest. You'd hardly believe it, eh?"

I said something, but not what I thought. These good countryfolk, unimaginative . . . sad little sun-singer beating the bars.

Presently I asked, "Then is Bobtail the cub grown up, the cub that had hidden under the holly tree?"

"Ah, now your asking me one. You see, not knowing that Judy was dead, I didn't bother to dig it out, thinking that she would call it out in the

evening. Perhaps she did call it out, and with the others went on the prow!—but I don't know, they were too small. Tiny creatures, like kittens, they were."

"Barbt'l baint much like a kitten to-day!" said the trapper in squeaking fury. "Wait till I clitch on to he!"

I imagined that the earthy creature was upset by the thought of sixpences he had lost. A ten-mile hack home awaited me. I rose, and stretched my legs. Cockerlegg was peering at me through the dry ferns of his eyebrows as though I were a being far superior to his humble self. But he was only waiting to borrow my lighted match.

In the stable, Blackie, the soft-mouthed, greeted me with a whinney, and the groom unstrapped the rug. We set out for home. There were stars shining in the water of the ditches, and the wind passed in the darkness.

II

Three days afterwards I walked and trotted Blackie to the meet at Smoky House, a thatched inn at the joining of three roads. Charlie Tarr the huntsman was going to draw Scythe Wood. His Lordship was heard to exclaim to a friend that it *ought* to be a good scenting day, but of course, one could never tell. The keen blue eye of the Master had noted that no hound had rolled

on the wayside grass, or bitten a blade. No gossamer floated on the air, and no spider webs were yet spun on the hedges. The paving stones of the courtyard had shown sweat that morning, the air was clear and light, and, most significant of all, hounds had smelled strongly as they trotted out of kennels. There was no wind.

Nimrod was out to-day, the pad of his near fore paw healed. It had been cut by a broken glass bottle on Pippacott Common. He was the best hound in the country. His puppies were famous in the Quorn and the Pytchley, the V.W.H. and the Duke of Beaufort's. An American sportsman had offered five thousand dollars for him, but no money would buy Nimrod. His head was light and dignified, he had a long clean neck, without looseness or throatiness, his ears were set low and close to the head. His muscular back was straight and wide, his chest was deep, his shoulders long and sloping, his forelegs white and straight as mushroom stalks, his feet round and catlike. Strong and straight hocks for tireless running, a stern carried gaily upwards, and a tongue true as its music. Three young hounds were licking his head as he stood on the triangle of sward before the inn, watching the eyes of the huntsman.

While I was looking at the faces above the gleaming coats of horses around me, I heard a squeaky voice saying, "Good morning, your lordship's honour, and I hope you'm very well, midear." Turning round, I saw Tom Cockerlegg grab his

tattered hat from off his head, and with the horny finger touch his brow to the Master above him.

"Morning', Tam, mornin'" replied the Master, as he fingered his bristly moustache. He was a short fierce tubby little man, and his intimate friends called him Seal.

The horny finger beckoned. The Master leant over.

"If your Lordship's honour will excuse me, but please to listen, my lord, there be a turrible lively varx (fox) in Smoky Wood, a monster girt varx I can't abear, for it steals all my rabbuts, my lord, and I were so near to un last dimmity (twilight) I could have dapped un on the head, surenuff, if your Lordship's honour will excuse me telling of ee."

"Us'll r-r-roll'n over for ee, one day!" cried the Seal on horseback, in a hearty voice. "Don't ee worry, midear."

Tom had taken his Lordship birdnesting when he was a boy, and they were good friends. Then the trapper beckoned, the Master leaned down again, and Tom whispered, "Yurr, you! Yurr! Has your Lordship's honour a bit o' baccy? I haven't had a smoke for a week and more. Too poor, my lord, tis Bobtail, my lord, taking all my rabbuts."

Out came the pipe, and the big brass watch. Now I knew why the fingernail was kept so long. Cunningly it levered open the back of the watch; and his Lordship's tobacco, the expensive John Cotton, was pushed and rammed with amazing

speed into the watch, which was empty of works, and but a hollow box.

"Thank ee my lord, thank ee midear", said Tom, giving back the oilskin pouch to the Master, and looking at the face of the watch. "It be half-past ten o'clock a'ready, my lord!" and he hurried away to the van of the rabbit agent, which was collecting rabbits from farm and cottage to take them to the station.

Huntsman Charlie blew a note on his horn. Whipper-in called names of hounds. We moved off down one of the roads, and up a lane. "Follow me", said the pig-farmer.

Just before eleven o'clock Nimrod entered Scythe Wood at the north-eastern end, followed by Thunderer, Doomsday, Firefly, Solway, Duchess, and Guardsman. The pig-farmer and I waited behind a cattle shed from where we could observe a gap in the western point of the Scythe, by a lightning-burned stump of an ash-tree. "The best place", he said. "If a fox is at home, he'll leave at this end. We must keep pretty quiet".

"Do you think Bobtail is here?" I asked.

"Tom Cockerlegg says he saw him last night, coming out".

I had to soothe Blackie, for the cries of huntsman and whip could be heard faintly in the wood. Immediately the pigeons flew out of the oaks. We waited. The last pigeon had clattered out and the wood had been silent for about a minute, when a jay started to scream, in the querulous and

sustained manner which I recognised as the call to other birds when man is not the enemy. My companion looked at me significantly. "Quiet, Blackie, quiet" I whispered, pulling the ears of the restless horse. A family of longtailed tits flitted down the hedge, hanging upside down to search the bud-coverings for insects, and calling to each other with tiny cries which made a gossamer-link of sound in the winter morning. The jay kept up its scolding. Was a fox on his pads? A dead stick snapped in the woods, and I could hear a hound going through the undergrowth.

I whispered, "Have you any idea how the fox seems to know where hounds will meet?"

He shrugged his shoulders, meaning that he didn't know.

"Shsh!" he warned.

A hound whimpered in the wood. A blackbird scuttled away down the hedge, and dived into the leafy ditch.

"That was Nimrod speaking. Hark!"

Other hounds were whimpering.

"That's Bobtail. I know the line he'll take to get to Cockabells. He'll run the bottoms, where its thick stuff, and boggy, and take a sweep round through Pippacott wood, and come out by Turberville Common. You follow me."

He whispered this rapidly. Nimrod spoke again.

"Dont make a sound. He'll be out and away in a flash".

Blackie stood still. Sometimes his withers shivered. He who had been striving to shake the bits from his mouth, and half-playfully to rid himself of the irksome girths, saddle, and, perhaps, the two-legged encumbrance astride his back, now was taut from ears to cannons. A centaur stood under the hazels. Nimrod threw his tongue, the horn sang in the trees, the thrilling clamour of a find sent the blood faster. I felt light as the sunlight.

A brown leaf moved on the bank, and I was looking into the mask of a fox eight feet away from me. It looked boldly at me without the least fear, and I had the extraordinary thought that the mind behind the glance was equal with my own. But whereas my knees trembled with excitement, the fox was calm, and a little amused. Then it turned to look over its shoulder, and listen to the hounds. I saw its eyes a moment later, and they were laughing. Yes, as a dog laughs in play with its master. The yellow eyes laughed, and blinked; and then it was gone, but not before I had time to notice that a leather collar, with brass studs on it, was fastened round its neck.

There was no time to wonder. The pig-farmer let out a series of bellowing "Tally Ho's". Hound music filled the wood. Then, among the trees, *Ton-ton-ton-tavern, Ton-ton-ton-tavern, Ton-ton-ton-ton-ton-ton-ton-tavern!* The hill on our left turned back a faint echo of the Gone Away.

Horsemen waiting on the higher ground moved down at a canter. The pack broke through the undergrowth, and streamed over the bank by the burnt ash, led by Nimrod. He jumped from the bank, his larger pads slurring the track of Bobtail. Blackie reared and neighed as I held him back. Hounds dropped over the bank. Blackie danced, pranced, and fought for his head. Quiet, Blackie, Quiet! Let hounds go first.

When the last hound had left the wood, Charlie came over, his chestnut climbing like a cat and changing feet as it jumped. "It's Bobtail!" yelled the farmer, and added the weight of his "Yoi, yoi, on little dogs", to the marvellous and screaming cheer of Charlie Tarr. Blackie shot forward at a gallop—too much spirit for your heart, my dear, you must be held at a canter. He shook his head, the clods flew behind us, the hounds streamed before us, and two fields away went Bobtail. Hounds ran like a string of black and brown and white beads which had broken, but not scattered.

Bobtail leapt up the farther bank as Nimrod leapt down into the stubble of the field called Broadwall. He was going at nearly his fastest pace, but he did not fear. As he ran, many smells crossed his way. The smell of flat-poll cabbages, whose outer leaves were decaying, lay like an air-covering all around the field. Mingled in this still layer were the smells of rats, of tar, and of men. Squeezing under a gate he came into a field where two men

were putting down tar into the holes of rats. A terrier was watching the hole, with bent head. Bobtail ran quietly down the hedge, and then up, through a row of flat-polls a few yards south of the ratters. As he passed them they heard the hounds, and stood upright. Bobtail got to the opposite hedge without being seen, and he gained a field while the pace slackened among the cabbages, for the hounds were confused by the smell of tar, and (possibly) by the yapping of the terrier struggling in the arms of her master. Nimrod took them on, and down the next field to the impassible "bottom," where among thorns, bracken, brambles, and marsh rushes, we could not follow.

I followed the pig-farmer and the huntsman. We went through gates and down lanes and over meadows, splashing through watery gaps which the hooves of the field far behind would soon beat into yellow mud. We crossed the main road, and cantered across several fields, coming to a small track green with sward in a rough heathland of gorse and heather. This was an old Roman road, which was used now only by carters. Here we waited, and dismounted in order to save our horses as much as possible for what was coming.

The beams of the sun were not yet warm enough to dry the dew from the sere heads of the carline thistles, and scent would be thick for their following. I was lighting a cigarette when the tongueing of the pack floated up from below the common.

Almost immediately I saw Bobtail again. He was racing across a stubble field about half a mile away. The huntsman vaulted in the saddle, and was galloping downhill before I could get my left foot into the iron. Blackie stamped and snorted, and was off at a canter and then a gallop while I was lying across his back. Somehow I got my seat, and with flying irons we thudded down the swarded track. A brook ran over stones at the bottom, and this we hurtled over, and turned right-handed round a big hawthorn that clawed face, hat, boot, and coat.

Other riders appeared over the brow of the common, and got between the pig-farmer and myself. The mud of their hooves fell on my face. The pack was running without a straggler—as Charlie said afterwards, you could almost have laid a rug over them as they crossed a root-field, and covered all except the muzzle of Nimrod and the flag of Juniper. They swam the wimpling waters of the Fawley brook, and crashed through a “bottom”, and over a field where a white Minorca was kicking a crazy dance beside its head. (Another claim for the Hunt agent.) Bobtail ran the lane for six hundred yards, past a cottage where a woman was hanging out washing on the hedge, along a ditch and through a row of elms, and so to the soft brown earth of the Big Wheatfield. As he raced up the southern hedge a fox rose and slunk away from his bed in the centre; and in the northern hedge he sat and

watched the hunt go by; and when the last horseman had gone, he stole back to this bed, and slept, for he was Fang-over-lip.

Bobtail ran on, Nimrod three hundred yards behind him, and Juniper three hundred and eighty. Five of us galloping across Hangman's Mash half a mile behind—hunter, whip, pig-farmer, a girl riding astride, and I—and the Master cantering on the high road over and below the ridge a mile behind, at the head of a straggling cavalcade of fifty men and women.

It was a glorious chase. Charlie Tarr led, then the pig-farmer, then the whipper-in, the girl, and I came last. Through a gate, over more stubble, driving up three partridges with a whirr of wings into the air. A great bullfinch; I rammed my hat down on my ears. Steady, Black, old boy! Two were over, and then the whip's chestnut refused.

He forced its head round, swung back again, banged his heels into its muddy flanks; it turned away, he cried curtly, held its head straight, and clapped his boots against its flanks. I saw its muscles ridge and tighten. The man held its head straight to the tall black ragged hedge, it gathered itself together, its forelegs threw themselves up, it seemed to hang still, then crash; he was through. The hound-music was far away. Then the girl was over—her horse down on its knees. It stumbled, recovered, blundered. Somehow she pulled up its head, and cantered away over the stubble. It was my turn. Give

Blackie his head, I thought hotly, he knows his job, and needs no spur. A tremendous bullfinch, dark and thick and thorny, and I'm tall, and that branch of the crab-apple tree will smack my forehead, and perhaps catch my chin, and that will be the end of me, unless I'm dragged a mile or so first. Lord, I'm a funk. He who hesitates at the take-off is assuredly lost! Grip with the calves, tuck the toes in, and give Blackie his head. 'Ware that branch! Up! Reins across withers, thrown yourself on his neck . . . My eyes closed themselves, before the sudden-big thorns—crash, rip, bang! My topper was gone, but not my neck thank God, and Blackie was sinking to his knees, so very gently, it seemed, and the grass rose slowly as I curled off his neck and rolled clear. A nice toss. Dear old Blackieboy, I think I cried, as I picked myself up, and took the iron off my boot. Quaking and hot and happy, I fixed the strap along the safety-bar under the saddle-flap, hopped round on my right toes with my left leg up, and foot through iron, muttering, Stand, you swine, stand! to the excited and high-stepping hunter. He stood still for a moment, I threw myself across the saddle, and he hurled himself round and was off at a gallop. I had to shake free my left foot while leaning on the seat of the saddle, while nearer and nearer the ditch and low white-thorn hedge of the next field approached. The easy and smooth motion of the gallop enabled me to throw my leg over and get my seat, just before

we rose in the air and the loose swinging irons clanged dully against my boots. On, and on! I was only one field behind Charlie's holly-red coat. Blackie's heart and wind were splendid, and I shouted a sort of song to the beat of his hoofs. Lord, I was happy.

Soon the ground sloped up, and over another hedge was the Big Wheatfield, rising to the skyline. In this expanse of harrowed clods and flints stood an object wearing a broken bowler, a ragged tarpaulin, and split trousers. It barred the fox's way with open arms. Or it may have been welcoming him. It had a whitey-green face fixed in a ghastly grin. A claypipe was in its mouth. Its head was sprouting through the crown of its hat, in a thick yellow green curl. Its only companion hung upside down beside it, tied by a leg to a stick. Like itself, this companion was eyeless. It was a dead rook, beside a scarecrow. As Bobtail fled past, he disturbed three dying flies which had been sitting for warmth on the paper-white face of the shot bird. Straight the fox ran, through Crowstarver's Spinney on the ridge, and down the right-of-way to a field called Chowles Park. Over another field, in view of a cottage out of which ran half-a-dozen children.

"Marm! Marm!" one was still shouting to his mother as I passed. "Yurr be the varx-dogs! Come yurr, marm, come yurr to once, marm!"

Mother had been salting-in half a pig, and she hurried to the threshold with salt on her raw

hands and dragging Parson's wife's old brogue shoes on her smaller feet. She faded out of the tail of my eye. I could see the fox running along a hedge three fields in front. About two hundred yards separated Nimrod's nose and Bobtail's tag. Five and a half miles behind was Scythe Wood, where twenty-three minutes previously the notes of the Gone Away had glanced among the trees. Bobtail was about half a mile from Cockabells. Over a bank and into a by-lane, a scramble up another bank, and down into Latten's Close, a grazing field. Nice going. Quarter of a mile more, and then the chase would end. I urged Blackie on, hoping to be near enough to see where the fox concealed himself. I saw him nip over a bank, a tiny brownish object that disappeared at once.

The pack poured over a few moments later.

There was one more field. Nimrod threw his tongue and led them on, for he knew that unless he caught Bobtail in the next field, he would lose him. The hound's sense of smell was keener than his sight, and by this sense alone had he pursued Bobtail, covering the level ground at thirty miles an hour, tongue flacking and flakes of froth flying. Behind him thirty-five throats made a blended harmony as of bells in a tower brought down off their stays together. Bobtail leapt between two elms on the last bank, and dropped down. Twenty seconds later Nimrod followed, and after him came Nemesis and Starlight, Solway and

Thunderer, Firefly, Neptune, and the milkwhite Chloe. They ran about fifty yards into the field called Cockabells, and hesitated, sniffing the air. Some ran with noses to the ground, some straggled. Nimrod roved round the field, mute and eager, but not with the stride of two minutes before. He ran as in a maze. There was a certain area of the field, roughly defined by the reluctance of all hounds to enter it, which seemed to hold confusion. And then a hoarse long screeching cry was heard over the sunken lane, and the huntsman cantering over Latten's Close saw a ragged dark hat held by a great earthy paw waved above the plashed ash-sapling hedge.

"Oi-oo-aa-aa-yaa-yaa-iegh!"

The effort must have torn the throat strings out of the viewer's throat. The huntsman's horn spoke to the hounds. Up went their feathery sterns. Crack! crack! the lash of whip's thong a few moments later. The pig-farmer, his big red face streaked with mud-splashes running down to his chin in sweat, hooked the iron gate-fastener off its staple with the stag's-horn handle of his whip and swung open the five-bars for the pack to pass. Led by huntsmen, they trotted down the sunken lane, to where Tom Cockerlegg was standing, ragged hat on ragged head. He was grinning. His grey sheepdog sat on a sack high up the bank. He held a sieve in one hand, for he was about to scatter earth over a gin he had tilled at the opening of a rabbit bury. Big leather pads, like the armour

of a gigantic brown beetle, were tied round his knees; the bones of which would have rotted seasons before if he had not always worn them.

"Have ee got 'n?" he asked.

"Which way did'n go, Tam?" cried the huntsman, abruptly.

"Oo, I cant say for sure, Charlie. I seed un rinning in Cockabells, and twas all a'could do to hold Bess back from sparking after un. But they varx dogs dont welcome shipdogs (sheepdogs), and so a'gave Bess a dapp, and told'n tu lie down." A look of earnestness came into his face as he asked, "Have ee killed Bobtail at last, Charlie?"

"If ee didden view un, then why the devil did ee holle', ye old vule (fool), you?" shouted Charlie, in a rage, wheeling round his horse.

"Woll, Charlie, woll" said the trapper, blinking like a bewildered owl "I didden see no huntsman and so I were just sparking on the varx-dogs, Charlie!"

Charlie muttered something about the trapper being mazed as a vuz-peg. Hounds were taken back to the field. Here stood one tree, the Icicle Oak, a sapless ruin nine centuries old, hollow, and half its bark shed. It stood in the centre of the area of confusion. Its five remaining branches, all dead, stretched to the sky like the charred wrists and hand of a giant thrust up through the turf. It had not dropped an acorn for a hundred years. Again Nimrod cast round the field, followed by the bewildered and listless pack.

The bobtailed fox had vanished, exactly as in other years.

The four long-drawn notes of the recall, a melancholy sound, for it meant no more excitement at bullfinches and over banks, floated out of Charlie's horn. The pressure against the corner of his mouth, where the mouthpiece was held, wrinkled his forehead, on which three thorn-rips showed red. The whip's voice calling hounds could be heard across the field in the air so still that not one woodpecker's tinder fragment, hanging on spider-thread on the dry bark, shook or spun.

The hounds sat down, rolled, licked veteran heads, growled, and yawned. In twos and threes the field cantered up on sweating horses. The Master had taken a toss in the Fawley Brook, and was covered with weed. He and the rest of the field had thought that a fox out of Scythe Wood would run another direction. Under the Icicle Oak many dismounted, handing reins to grooms, while sandwich boxes were opened, and saddle flasks taken out of leather cases.

I heard the huntsman telling the Master and Secretary about the collar round the neck of the fox. "Wha?" barked the Seal, immediately, and enquired the name of the man who had seen it. Charlie said my name. His Lordship exclaimed, "Pooh, that writin' fellar! He will be shakin' hands with the fox next, or writing that he has. Same thing, perhaps!"

Then he realized that I was near. He laughed,

and said in a hearty bantering voice, "Its time you got a pair of spectacles, young fellar ! Have some port."

I thanked him, and took the long parsnip-shaped glass flask. As I was turning the silver stopper, I watched the dismounted huntsman kicking with the toe of his boot one of the big yellow fungi that grew in the hollow of the oak, near its base. For years the tough growths had clung there, each as big as a saddle, but thicker. As I looked idly at Charlie's cap, something glinted in the weak winter sunlight. A drop of moisture fell on his boot, and ran a couple of inches down the black leather of the calf, where the stirrup leather had worn a smooth mark. Charlie sniffed, and drew his hand across his nose. But the drop had not fallen from it, for when I held back my head and tipped back the flask between my teeth, I saw the head of the fox looking out of a hole near the top of the tree. I choked over my mouthful of wine, and kept my eyes on the ground, dreading to hear the shout that must surely follow my stupid gasp and stare. Then I realized I was pouring away the Master's wine, and hastily righted the flask, secured the stopper, and returned it with thanks. A moment later I realized that no one had noticed anything about me. I moved away, two feelings strong in me—elation at the honour of being invited to drink from the Master's flask, and dread at the thought of discovery, with immediate death, for Bobtail.

About twenty yards from the tree I stopped, and slowly lifted my gaze to where he was sitting, calm and at ease. He seemed to have found a natural seat within the tree, from where he could watch the men and women below him. His ears were cocked, as though listening to what was being said. He looked from one face to another, and at the hounds. His tongue hung over his teeth but there was too much noise—the jingle of bits, voices, laughter, caw of rooks overhead—for his panting to be heard.

While I was covertly watching him, I realized that someone was trying to persuade the huntsman to try a terrier at the base of the hollow tree. It was the girl who had ridden before me during the run. Charlie grinned, and shook his head: "He bant there, miss." I walked near to hear exactly what would be said when the famous, or infamous Bobtail was caught at last. But why had not Charlie thought of the tree before? It was an obvious place, and had occurred to me the first time I saw it.

"Yurr, Vic!" said the huntsman, cracking second finger and thumb for the terrier, which had been carried during the chase in a leather satchel slung on a groom's chest.

Hounds sometimes walked up to the tree, to leave it again with expressions of disgust on their faces that all who are accustomed to any dogs recognize at once. The older hounds sat about thirty yards away, by the whipper-in, the terrier

with him. Victor ran to Charlie Tarr. The terrier was patted, spoken to in a fierce low bloodthirsty tone, held by the ribs, and its nose shoved into the hole. Immediately it refused. Charlie called it back. It refused again, and ran away.

"No varx there, miss!" laughed Charlie, while Bobtail looked down at him, with bright eyes. "Its my own opinion, miss, that he runs himself out of scent just about hereabouts, and goes on, but the scent ends at this field. Scent is carried most in the brush, and that there li'l tag dont carry very much to begin with."

The Master decided to draw Gardebone Wood after lunch, and with the pack trotting at Charlie's heels, and preceded by about a hundred motor-cars, the Hunt moved off. Tom Cockerlegg stood and held open the gate. In his squeaky voice he asked Charlie why the mask of Bobtail was not hanging to his saddle.

"A' cuodden hear no rattle o' worrying, or dogs barking, but ye've got un, surenuff?"

Charlie did not answer. The Hunt passed through the gate, a little girl on a pony led by a groom trotting in the rear. I turned off to the right, wanting to see the end. I hid myself round a corner, and dismounted, holding Blackie's reins while he pulled at the grass.

When the last shoe had ceased to clack in the lane, the trapper climbed the steep bank to the field. I watched Bess the sheepdog with him.

At a squeak from him she ran away to the Icicle Oak. Tom was carrying a hammer in his right hand. I slung the reins on a stub of a cut hazel stole and walked to where man and dog were waiting by the cold growths of the fungi. I hurried, in a rage at the thought of the fox being hit with the hammer, and, in its tired state, worried by the sheepdog. When I reached the tree the tag of the fox showed as it climbed down hindfirst. I was amazed, and then I remembered the collar.

"Fetch un" whispered Tom, and Bess seized the tag, and pulled it, very gently. Bobtail came into daylight and licked the hand of Tom, who took off the collar and fastened it round the neck of Bess, where it had been when first I had met man and dog in the parlour of the *Moon in the Mere*. I watched the sheep-dog playing with the fox, which she had loved, said Tom, ever since he had put the little dark brown cub with her own litter of puppies, years before, when the trapper had found it whimpering and shivering in the dewy grass behind the pig-breeders orchard.

"He's been a good mate to me, your honour, and can snick a rabbut smarter nor a lurcher dog will. And he's smart enough to know that they varx-dogs cant abear the stink of Granfer's Saddles, as us calls they girt toadstools."

That was why hounds had faltered. The taint of the fungi must have lain in a belt far around the tree, and overpowered the scent of the fox as soon

as he entered it. It had lain warm and still in the windless morning.

"Yurr, Bob, shake hands wi' his honour, for a gennulman will stand by a friendship when his hand be to it."

The fox held up his slender paw, and I shook it, and then Bess held up hers, and looked at me with her grave and beautiful eyes. Afterwards dog and fox played together, bounding and rolling and running. I took out my pipe. Owlsh eyes behind hair watched me, and the high squeaky voice said,

"Yurr, smoke a pipe of my baccy, midear. Tis grand to burn, surenuff!"

It pleased me to think that he considered me his friend to the extent of revealing his secret store; but to my surprise he did not hand me the watch, but an old cocoa tin, filled with various tobaccos, mostly shag, including what looked like a chopped-up cigar. When I had filled my pipe (intending to tap it out again as soon as I was out of his sight) the cunning old fellow took out the brass watch, exclaimed that it was time to get back to work, and walked away over the hoof-marked turf, squeaking with laughter, to his gins in the sunken lane.

THE FLIGHT OF THE PALE PINK PYJAMAS

One sunny morning in the month of May, as I was walking over a Devon hill, I noticed in the sky a tiny cloud of peculiar shape and colour. Leaning against a wind-gnarled ash, I focussed my glass, and was amazed to see what appeared to be a pair of trousers sailing by themselves at a great height. The legs were filled with air, and trailing behind a dark and narrow object like a fragment of eyelash. As I watched, the eyelash broke in two; and I followed the birds across a cloudless sky until they dropped into a distant wood, and then I walked on to my destination, a house in the valley beyond, where I was going to meet for the first time Major Arthur Cavan V.C., D.S.O., M.C., who had recently returned from Norway where he had been making photographic studies of bird-life.

I was eager to meet Cavan, and had been delighted when, by the eight o'clock post that morning, I received a letter inviting me over "any day you like." He explained that he had read an article of mine about the Red Kite, and as he was anxious to see one of these birds, which he had believed to be extinct in Great Britain, he had written in the hope that my description of its flight and feeding habits was based upon actual observation.

THE FLIGHT OF THE PYJAMAS

I decided to go over at once, and an hour before noon left my cottage to walk the seven miles to his place—a pleasant journey through hilly country grooved by deep wooded combes, or valleys. I had climbed a gate and was walking through the long grasses of a meadow to the low grey house when I saw a slight man standing under an oaktree and whistling, while he looked among the leafy branches overhead. A leather gauntlet was worn on his left hand and wrist, with an object that looked like a badly stuffed bird. He turned when I was a few yards away, and I was attracted by his soft brown eyes, which gave his face a feminine sensibility. He said good-morning and took off his hat. Above the brow and along the top of the dark head two narrow furrows were driven in the skin of the scalp, and by those twain, where bullets had torn out the roots of hair, I knew him.

I had never before seen Major Cavan, but I had read his books, and knew his reputation. I suppose there is hardly a boy in any preparatory or public school where Cavan has lectured and shown his unique films and slides of wild life who doesn't remember him with enthusiasm. He must have worn out several gold nibs in signing his name in autograph books. One of the few survivors of the original Royal Flying Corps, he was awarded the Victoria Cross for fighting, alone, sixty German 'planes over their own 'drome behind the Hindenburg Line one day in the last

year of the Great War, nine of which he had crashed before firing all his ammunition and flying away with thirteen wounds in his body, and blinded by his own blood which ran from two furrows torn by bullets in his scalp.

After we had shaken hands he explained that he was waiting for one of his Norwegian goshawks to fly down from the tree. I looked up and saw a brown bird about two feet long from beak to tail perched on a bough. Its staring eyes were filled with a morose and sullen expression. Cavan explained that the affair of wings on his left arm was a lure by which a hawk was attracted back to the fist after a flight. I noticed that small bells were tied to its legs, which were almost hidden as it huddled there with its breast feathers puffed out.

"She's sulking" said Cavan, and told me why. He said that the finest exhibition of flying he had ever seen, "by the most graceful birds of heaven" had taken place half an hour before my arrival, and when I considered this statement from a man who at the age of twenty three had brought down nine battleplanes in less than three minutes, you will be able to realize how I wished I had seen it. He told me all the details in his sharp, excited manner, but I wish I could convey them as vividly as he told me.

At ten o'clock that morning Major Cavan had gone to his desk to begin an essay which he had meditated several days. He wrote slowly, dis-

THE FLIGHT OF THE PYJAMAS

tracted by many sights from his paper *The Extinct Red Kite of Great Britain*. He found it more pleasant to watch the finches in the garden, the butterflies which danced their sun-dance over the flowers, and his wife hanging out washed garments on the line which stretched from a laburnum tree to a hook in the wall above the window where he was sitting.

These garments waved in a valley wind not strong enough to ruffle a wren's breastfeather or sway a floret of sweetwilliam. White blouses, two pale blue camisoles, a sextet of tiny handkerchiefs, the trousers and jacket of a pair of pyjamas—all of silk. His wife went away, and he glanced at what he had written.

For centuries the wild Red Kite lived in London under the protection of the Lord Mayor, as it was a scavenger of the city, seaking its food among the garbage and offal of the streets. It nested amicably with the pigeons on the ledges of St. Paul's Cathedral and other high buildings.

The shrilling cry of a blackbird made him think of a cat in the garden (he had a fear of cats) as he cleaned his nib and prepared to write another paragraph. He ceased a quarter of an hour later when the voice of his wife from the garden said,

"How silly of me! I thought I had hung it there, and I hadn't!"

He enquired what was silly, and she said she was certain that she had hung two camisoles on

the line, whereas one only was there, with two spare pegs. The disappearance was mysterious, for it could not have been blown away by such a gentle wind.

She suggested that he had hidden it for a joke. She looked under the lavender bushes which grew behind the wallflowers and sweetwilliams. Frowning and smiling and puzzled Mrs. Cavan after a further search returned to the house.

At eleven o'clock he got up from his desk, and went out of the room and through the kitchen into the yard, where in a loose-box used as a falconers' mews three hawks were perching, leashed to blocks. He slipped the leashes and putting on a leather gauntlet carried the kite on his wrist to a bow perch in the lawn. When he had fetched the goshawks for their daily airing, he returned to his desk.

He tried to write while the shrilling of a black-bird above an almost continuous chatter of finches and titmice from the bushes and shrubs around the lawn was like glass bottles being broken against a sack of steel chains. The garden birds were scolding a pair of goshawks and the kite. He had brought two kites from Norway, but one had died.

The actions of these birds interested him more than the writing of the essay. The goshawks flapped their wings and spread their tailfeathers, and turned their heads repeatedly to gaze at the sky. Their perches were made of willow sticks

whose ends sharpened to points were thrust into the turf.

Barcud the kite (Cavan had given it the old Welsh name of the Red Kite) sat miserable and still. It was thin, and ate less every day, for it was pining. Often Cavan had regretted that he had not released the pair before the death of the male bird, for his reason in bringing them to England was to free them when tame in the hope that they would nest in the oakwood on the valley side, where he might photograph them.

He wrote on.

The peculiar sailing or gliding flight of this bird led to the name of Glead, or The Glider, by which it was formerly known. Grace of flight, its rich chestnut colouring, and its useful service for centuries to Englishmen as a refuse remover in his towns, have not saved it from annihilation. Persecution by land-owners, for the sake of pheasant shooting, and by poultry owners, who had only to poison a sheep's carcase and leave it in the fields to destroy the Glider, reduced its numbers so that it became a rare bird.

In the garden the miserable kite uttered a whistling cry, which Cavan had never heard before. The goshawks were moving their feet on the curved willow perches, and cocking eyes at the sky, but as they stared at every passing bird he had no thought of what bird was sailing out of his sight.

Its rarity saved it from further persecution by gamekeeper and roost-owner, for the Red Kite

soared no more above the English fields. A few pairs still lived in the wilder forests, but their eyries were sought out by men who robbed the nests and shot the parent birds, for by reason of the kite's rarity, its eggshells and skin were worth man's gold. Before the Great War five pairs were known in the British Isles, four of them being in Wales. This year, wishing to photograph a nest before it became too late, I sought the owners of the properties where these birds lived, only to learn to my regret, that the kites were no longer there.

It is to be feared that this beautiful bird, of whom Shakespeare wrote "When the kite builds, look to lesser linen," has vanished from the land.

He put down his pen, determined to abandon the essay. What was the use of repeating what naturalists knew already, when he had no original facts to record about it, and no chance of ever filming its flight, so famous in olden time? He pushed back his chair, swaying it on its back legs. He had made a rule to write only in the morning, between the hours of ten and one, but at twelve o'clock his natural indolence (he told me) overcame completely his self-disciplinary desire. While he was pressing tobacco into a pipe, he heard again the wailing whistle from Barcud and saw her flap her wings in an attempt to rise from her perch. The goshawks showed, by their dipping as though for a take-off, that they were disturbed by the presence of something in the sky out of Cavan's sight. He sprang up, and was

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stretching over the desk to lean out of the window, when he heard a sudden soughing of wings and saw a shadow sweep over the lawn, and as it vanished two clothes pegs dropped on the grass.

He jumped out of the window, and when his wife ran out in reponse to his shouts she saw the extraordinary sight of the lower portion of a pair of pale pink pyjamas filled with air and borne from the earth by a big bird holding the fastening cord in its talons.

II

Now I had known of that kite's existence for over a year. I saw him first during the previous spring, at the time of change of colour on the forest's floor from brown to blue. Bees came to the bluebells hiding the dead leaves, and one morning, wandering under the pines which crested the oakwood on the hill, I saw in the beams of the sun rising above the line of the distant moor a big bird hawking them with the ease of a swallow. I had never seen a bird like it before, but when it turned, and showed a long forked tail, I knew it for a Red Kite! Morning after morning I watched this rare and solitary bird, as I lay on a bed of heather and bracken in a sleeping shelter of pine branches. He roosted always in the same tree, perched on a particular branch. At the join of this branch with the trunk

was a flat nest of sticks, to which he added honeysuckle vines and leaves every day, but I never saw a mate with him. I named him Glead.

Sleeping in the wood, I awoke at songlight. The badgers lumbered home to their holt near the roots of Glead's tree; the tawny owl hunched itself against a pine trunk and blinked like a cat into slumber; the carrion crow croaked on its treetop nest; the kite flapped its long narrow wings and yawned. From the valley below came the sound of water running in a stony bed, but the sky-gleams had not yet come on the brook when the first lark sprang from the tussock beside its mate and aspired with its song of life.

During the days of watching, I grew to believe that the hopes and desires of wild birds were equal with man's. I was convinced that Glead had an imagination, that he imagined he had a mate (a dangerous thing for man to do), and that the objects he brought to the empty nest were pleasing to her.

Every dawn he awakened as the soft white orb of the morning star was shrinking into a gold bead, as though melted in the pale light flowing to the zenith from the unrisen sun. He flapped his long red narrow wings, and looked at the dim and spectral trees of the forest, and whistled, and jumped off the branch to begin the day's search. He was searching always, at every season, but between the times of sap-rising and leaf-unfolding his lack was more acute. Before the sun came up

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over Dunkery Beacon he soared to meet it, whistling a wild call as he threw his pinions, and as light deepened with the beams of the sun bending over the world, his eyes scanned the spaces above and below him. When the air was clear he could see many birds in many miles of airy desert, but never a fork-tailed bird with wings spread like his own. He espied his food while high in the sky, gliding down to take it in the claws of his short toes. Rabbits and rats he seized more often than small birds, and he liked grasshoppers, snatching them low on the slopes yellow with birdsfoot trefoil.

Only once did I see him attacking another bird, and then I think he chased it because it was insolent to him. The bird was an oodmall,¹ or green woodpecker, whose cry, as of derision, rang in the forest while it flew from tree to tree. From his branch Glead watched it hammering a rotten oaktree, tearing away pieces as long as a man's finger and dropping them below while clinging to the trunk by claw and tailquill. Maggots bored the wood, and the woodpecker's long tongue, thin as wire, darted into their tunnels and drew them out. When it had fed it flew to Glead's tree and perching a yard away opened its beak, threw back its scarlet head, and cackled at the kite, for quite half a minute, until Glead launched himself at the oodmall and drove it away. He twisted in flight among the branches, swerving and avoiding

¹ Possibly a corruption of wood-awl, from the bird's beak.

twigs with the ease of a swallow, although he spanned nearly six feet. The tip of a wing missed a tree by an inch, but the brain which ordered the full stroke of the pinion knew that not one filament barb would be unhooked. Sometimes he tilted out of the way of a branch in a twirling throw of wings like the ruddy spokes of a swift carriage wheel. Then he came with suddenness upon Oodmall, who had perched against a vertical trunk. Glad turned beak over tail in the space of his span, and clutched at the green back, but Oodmall had pushed himself with his stiff tail round the tree. His cry, so startlingly mocking to human ears, rang out like a jibe. The kite, seeming to pivot round the trunk on one wing-tip, viewed him again, and the woodpecker flew away. Glad pursued him in and out and around trees, while Oodmall, closing the short wings of his sturdy body, went straight through foliage and twigs as though a bolt, rust-red and moss-green, were pursued by the crossbar that had shot it.

The chase was ended by the woodpecker disappearing inside a tree which it struck in flight, seeming to pierce the bole with its beak and head. At the base of the tree scores of chips and fragments of sappy wood were scattered, gouged out of the living timber by Oodmall and his wife during many weeks. The entrance to this home was a straight hole for several inches, when it opened downwards into a bottle-shape, on the floor of which, resting on wood dust, were five

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white shining shells. Five little oodmall were tucked inside these eggs, heads between legs, and not so much as a feather among them; but they were very warm, for their mother was sitting on them. Beside her the woodpecker rested for a few minutes, and then it climbed out to fly with a ringing cry to Glead's tree, to pick woodlice out of the sticks of the rotten nest.

He sought the food for his mate in safety, for Glead was a mile high in the sky, sweeping in wide circles and searching for another bird like himself. He soared without thrust or throw of pinion. Sometimes he rushed into vapour, when the sun was hidden from him, and whenever again he saw its shining disc and the wood below him, a wild whistling cry fell from his beak. Never was there answer.

He broke his fast on a rat, which he filched from a magpie. The rat had been caught in a gin set by a farmer, and flung dead among the blades of young barley. From the lofty sky Glead watched a black and white bird with a long tail flicker off a thorn by a gate and alight on the field. Although more than a mile of air was between kite and magpie, his eyes saw the magpie's beak battering that on which it was perched. They saw the long tail of the magpie open as it balanced itself for quick blows. Glead dropped to a thousand feet, level with the trees on the hill-sides, and glided still lower, so that he was hidden from the magpie. With flaps of long hollow wings

he beat over the grass and up the slope to the hedge, throwing himself up and buoyantly over the thorns, and was upon the magpie before that hardworking and hungry bird could rattle its note of rage. Glead did not attack it, for he had come only for the rat, which he plucked in his left foot before swinging away. The magpie's harsh chatter brought other magpies and a carrion crow out of the wood, who followed the kite and tried to peck him from below and dash upon him from above, while the crow sought to wound him with its open beak. Glead easily avoided the crow, and flew leisurely to his tree to eat the rat on the old nest.

It must have been several seasons old, for many of the sticks of the flat structure were brittle and grown with fungus and moss. They were of elm, holly, and oak, and bore a load of decorations. Bines of honeysuckle, with the leaves still green, trailed across the four feet of its width. There were flowers—foxgloves, dandelions, and orchids. Glead's taste was catholic, for he saw an adorning beauty in a crumpled square of white cloth marked in red letters PROPERTY OF THE GREAT WESTERN RAILWAY. The sun only knows where he got it from!

After his meal Glead cleaned toes and talons with his beak, and rearranged the flowers and the hand-towel. While he was doing this, Oodmall, seeing an earwig crawling along a stick near the edge of the nest, flew from a tree from where he

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had been watching, picked it up, and sped away with a loud cry. Glead was too busy, tearing up *The Times Literary Supplement* which he had taken from my shelter, to chase the oodmall, but I saw him turn and swear at it.

The meal of the rat was a poor one, but when he had eaten nine bees, three beetles, a worm, a lizard, and a buck-rabbit (leaving only its ears beside the snare of brass wire pegged into the turf by a run) he was gorged and satisfied. He flew home and perched on the bough above the nest until he felt less sleepy, when he mounted a little wind and soared above the earth, solitary under the sun as he uncoiled his mortal destiny in flight.

In one valley over which he passed he saw smoke rising from a chimneystack in the orange-coloured lichened roof of a grey farmhouse, and linen on a line over a lawn. He glided lower, regarding the linen so intently that the desire to bear them back to the old nest overcame his fear of buildings from which smoke arose. He swooped into the garden and snatched at one of the garments, ripping it from the pegs which held it, and carried it back to his pine-tree.

Restless in the state of unlove, and soothed by the faculty of imagination, Glead rearranged his decorations. The blue camisole was torn into three pieces and adorned with dandelions, while by an unconscious movement the tail of a rat was poked into the mouth of a rabbit skull, so that when Glead flew off and I climbed the tree, I got

the impression of a little, bald, and bone-headed man smoking a cigar and reading about the sale of old books at Sotheby's on the last page of the *Literary Supplement*.

Glead returned to the farmhouse, meaning to get some more from the line, and as he circled above the roof and treetops, preparing to make his swoop, he saw something which made the featherlets of his neck stand out in excitement. Upon the lawn he had espied another bird like himself. As he glided down a wailing whistle came up to meet him, for the tame kite had seen him; and his reply was so joyful that it was hoarse. Recklessly he swooped upon the line, hidden from view of Major Cavan by the top of the window, who seeing the extraordinary sight of his pyjamas sailing off, apparently by themselves, gave a shout and ran out into the garden.

The goshawks on their perches were jumping in agitation, and flapping their wings, while the tame kite cocked a wild silver eye skywards and whistled to Glead. Cavan ran indoors for his tripod and camera, which was loaded with a spool of film, and when he returned Glead was still circling above the house, calling repeatedly for the leashed kite to fly up to him. Cavan tried to conceal himself and his camera in the hope that the bird would descend; and the small hands, which during flying combat at ten thousand feet had been without a tremor, now holding tripod and handle were shaking with suspense. His

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natural faculties, absorbed almost entirely in the study of wild birds, gave him a mental picture of the photographic possibilities of the occasion. He glanced at the goshawks. If the wild kite wouldn't descend, why not fly them at it, in the hope that they would force it to descend within camera range. What pictures the fight would make !

His wife ran to him, and looked up, her hand shielding from her eyes the glare of the sky. Glead, trailing the air-bellied trousers by the cord which was entangled in his talons, saw the glint of the camera lens, and feared to fly lower.

Cavan acted almost immediately the thought had come into his mind. In general outline and appearance when resting the goshawks resembled Glead, having hooked beaks, yellow legs and toes, and strong curved black talons for binding on to their prey. But in hue of plumage and shape of wing they differed. The eyes of the goshawks were fiercer, and ringed with lemon rings and their dull white breasts were barred with thin black lines like the charred cracks of ashen logs in a fire. They were sturdier than the kite, although not so long. Major Cavan focused his camera on the male bird while his wife pulled the leashes of soft leather through the brass swivels of the jesses attached to its feet, and threw up the bird. As soon as it recovered flying balance the short wings flickered and it climbed upwind, to turn when level with Glead and dash at him. Meanwhile

Mrs. Cavan had unleashed the larger female goshawk, which sprang off the perch as the male struck at Glead and the kite tumbled. Now the hand turning the handle was steady. The birds were above the house, perfectly grouped and in focus as a foot-stroke of a goshawk slashed one leg of the pyjamas from waist to ankle.

Barcud on the low-perch on the lawn was flapping its wings and wailing as it watched Glead trying to soar above the cuts of the savage goshawks, whose shorter and wider wings enabled them to rise over the kite, and swoop upon him with wings half-closed and tails shut, with toes spread and talons sharp as needles ready to rend his back. In swift spirals they climbed, and at each pounce Glead shifted and tumbled, for he was hampered by the stolen garment, of which he could not rid himself. Sometimes he stooped upon one of his enemies as it missed him; at other times he threw his head between his legs (as the camera afterwards revealed) in an effort to tear away the entanglement on his feet.

The combat, however, did not remain within camera range for long, and soon Cavan could straighten his back and light a cigarette in satisfaction. The satisfaction of the photographer did not stay with him many minutes, but gave way to a feeling of dismay and apprehension for the safety of the wild kite, whose wailing had changed to screaming as it realized that its attackers were too strong for it. The female

goshawk was the first to strike the quarry, knocking away many small feathers which the swallows and martins, wheeling in a flock above the hawks, descended to take in their beaks; and Cavan declared that they dropped these feathers and caught them again, twittering as though jubilantly at the disaster to one of their dreaded enemies.

Barcud was straining at her leashes as she tried to fly from the perch, and on impulse Cavan took out his knife and cut through the thongs of porpoise hide above the swivels, and the strings of gut holding the small bells to her legs, thus giving her perpetual freedom. Heavily on frayed pinions she flapped away, and as she rose above the roof the female goshawk fell upon her. She slipped sideways, and flew to join Glead. For many minutes Cavan watched the fight of the four birds, which ascended higher and higher, until above the line of the valley Glead and Barcud found the breeze which has been the friend of all kites since the beginning of wings.

Infuriated by their failure to strike down their quarries the goshawks combined to attack one kite at a time, realising, perhaps, that the higher they rose the more chance they had of escaping. Beating their wings twice for every flap of the kite's pinions, their tails, like open fans, showing the dark bands upon them, they swerved in swift small rings above the wider and slower circles of the weaker female. They cut at her together, trying to bind upon her back or drive

her to the lower air for which their dashing manner was adapted. Cavan watched them through glasses. After the failure of several stoops they left Barcud, and attacked Glead, without striking him. He seemed to turn on his back and hold the trousers in their path, which they hit and dropped away from, while Glead flapped to poise with the wind under him.

After a while they found a stronger wind, in which they seemed to ignore the goshawks. On pinions widespread and motionless, their forked tails open, tilting their bodies to get the pressure of air at the turns, Glead and Barcud mounted higher at each gyration. The curves of their superb soaring were broken many times by flapping shifts to avoid the deadly dives of the baser hawks; but a few beats of pinions—each stroke of which commenced when the wings nearly met overhead and ended with the tips pointing to the earth beneath—placed them again in the tracks of their invisible airy wheels, and they soared thus until they were but tiny streaks assailed by specks which revolved and crossed the placid orbits of the two. Major Cavan and his wife gazed until their necks ached, when they lay on the grass and watched in comfort. Smaller and smaller became the birds, until the sight of four human eyes, aided by lenses and prisms of glass, saw them as motes of dust which merged into the blue. These motes vanished from aided human sight, but something dropped into visibility, something

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pink and tattered, and after it the goshawks appeared, zigzagging down the sky. The male returned to the lure, and was fed; but the female flew into an oak-tree, and sulked there. Slowly the silk rags drifted earthwards, far down the valley and out of sight, until Glead, followed by his mate, "the most graceful birds of heaven," declared Cavan, seized them in a triumphal swoop and bore them away to his nesting tree, where in the late summer four British kitelets were reared in safety, mocked in the forest by the cries of seven oodmall.

T'CHACKAMMA

Jafta Hallelujah, an old Kaffir shepherd with kick-scarred shinbones, who guarded the flocks of his master on the lower slopes of the mountain, saw the dark shapes moving high up across the ravine, and was frightened. He dared not run to Intaba Kraal and tell Baas, for Jafta Hallelujah feared the shapes more than the Boer farmer. Evil spirits dwelt in them, and the most dreaded in T'chackamma! *Maye Maye!*¹ Jafta Hallelujah struck his wrinkled bald pate with his wrist, and wept.

Half an hour before sunset, the Cave of Bats held all the tribe. Dogheaded, with close-set eyes, they squatted round T'chackamma, whose low gibbering speech was made with many grimaces. Some scratched themselves as they listened to the plans of raiding Intaba Kraal. Often the Chief ceased speaking and held up his head, closing his eyes with the pleasure of being scratched by his wife. He grunted, fluttering his white eyelids, and the upper lip of his face curled back from his teeth. Such teeth! They had been magnificent, but T'chackamma was growing old, and the years of captivity spent behind iron bars, and the unnatural food, had ruined them.

¹O Grief, Grief!

Brown tartar nicked the necks of four incisors. T'chackamma wore a collar, which was the only article of civilization among the tribe. Many eyes watched him, but none so fixedly as the eyes of T'je. The little male, who had left his mother only a few months, sat at the feet of Chief, absorbed in every expression of the patriarch's face. He was awed by the collar Chief wore. So intense was his admiration, that whenever T'chackamma coughed, T'je usually needed to clear his own throat. Whenever T'chackamma hooked away something in a fingernail, and crushed it in his teeth (this being the readiest revenge for torment) T'je usually happened to be bothered by a stinging itch at the same moment. As a fact, the youngster had few fleas; but he was at an age when he learned by imitating.

T'chackamma's voice ceased, and all began to talk. The air, already thickened with the warm breath of the assembled tribe, was stirred by guttural cries and mutterings of excitement. Three males, detailed by the Chief as scouts, pushed their way through a group of females, some of whom had young at the breast, and climbed along and down the narrow ledges above the ravine. Sometimes they swung themselves, easily, down the tough, rope-like stems of creeping plants. The empurpled glow of sunset was fading off the peaks of the mountains, and stars were about to glitter in the sky.

T'chackamma sat and listened at the mouth of

the cave, and they waited behind him. With a wafting of air many bats tumbled fluttering, one following another, out of the lifeless darkness of the remote cave into the rich gloom of African night. T'chackamma gave them one glance, and forgot them. He was thinking of the blood he would drink that night. He hated white men, and in both wakefulness and sleep he would sometimes groan as his memory made pictures of the thousands of white faces which had mocked him in captivity. That captivity had ended when one evening in the greatest rage he had broken his chain, and surprised the white man who had brought his supper, catching him by the arm that emptied a bucket of food into the trough, and pulling him through the door. The keeper had been a strong man, but in contest with T'chackamma his arms and spine were no more than mealie stems. At the subsequent inquiry, the written report of the doctor who had examined the body had not been made public, so awful had been the way of death. The escape of T'chackamma, which was cabled to every civilized country in the world, at the time thrilled and appalled the people of five continents; but the sequel was known only to the Kaffirs of Intaba Kraal and to the baboons of the Cave of Bats until Jafta, feeling death upon him, whispered to me out of his parching throat, years after it happened.

T'chackamma returned to his home on the mountain a year and a half after his escape. It is

perfectly true that he was greeted with cries of joy, for Jafta Hallelujah heard them, and he saw T'chackamma's wife embrace him, and watched her efforts to tug off the steel collar which was fastened round his neck in an incomprehensible manner.

The moon's rim rose through the mists of the veldt. Like a ripe and heavy gourd it rolled up the sky, in a mist of its own yellow juice. It threw a shadow of T'chackamma on the rocky wall, framed with a tangle of creepers. He turned, and in the direct pale rays the face of the blood-drinker was ringed with two white patches of skin. As he dug the hair below the ribs with a hook of four black fingernails, he rolled his eyeballs and fluttered his eyelids. He muttered a curse against the fleas, and when a baboon bumped into his back, he turned with a deep-throated snarl, which made it cower back. Imprisonment and torture had lacerated his nervous temper.

The Cave of Bats was not a place of dwelling, but a place of congress, where the baboons went when a raid upon a veldt homestead was being planned, or in times of common danger; for every white man and his dog were their enemies, and the white man's law gave them no protection. The cave had one permanent occupant, a grey-headed ancient who had been old when T'chackamma was crawling round his mother's knees. She lived deep in the cave, beyond the shaft of daylight that came through a fissure in the roof.

She was the guardian of that which was in the cave beyond the daylight crack, of that which no baboon had looked upon as it glimmered at the end of the cave under the mountain, and lived. They feared the guardian, for none who passed her had ever come back. Every day food was brought to her, and she never spoke.

They waited and listened. The precipices of the mountain across the ravine echoed multitudinous whisperings and devil-like chucklings which were water-noises from the river in its rocky bed below. A bird of the night, with great soft wings, flew with black flaps across the starlit mouth of the cave, returning as it came, in absolute feather-silence. As T'chackamma peered it let out a screech and tumbled in the air to clutch one of the bats which was hawking insects. The owl flew away, but like the ghosts of dead bats the screeches tumbled back, again and again, fainter and fainter, in an irregular sequence.

The swelled yellow gourd, freed of earth mists, shrunk hard and small and silver as it floated in the sky. A lion's roar came up from the river, and soon afterwards the cry of a scout. Immediately T'chackamma quitted the cave, and descended swiftly, followed by the tribe. He cared nothing for any lion, which indeed, meeting the baboons, would have fled. The toes of their feet gripped the edges and juts of rock as readily as their fingers.

By the side of the river, two hundred feet below

the Cave of Bats, the warriors formed themselves into two columns, which protected the flanks of the main body, of females and young. Some of the younger baboons, excited and frolicsome, bumped into the legs of their elders, and T'je, leaping away from a playmate, butted the naked hindquarters of the leader. He cowered, with hands on head. T'chackamma the Morose, T'chackamma the Terrible! Fingers caught playful T'je by the shoulder and dragged him off his legs, a hand thrust back his head, teeth gnashed by his shut eyes, hot breath made him whimper in a death-fear, another hand pressed nostrils and mouth so that T'je could neither cry nor breathe. Thus held, he was told that the least noise would mean his jaws being torn apart as a scorpion's tail is ripped out of its joint, and then he was flung on his back and left gasping in a yellow-bush. He picked himself up and followed quietly, at the very end of the main body, since T'chackamma was at the very beginning.

Hyenas slunk away when they winded what was coming, and slunk back to the carcase of the ox stricken at dusk by one of the lions which they had been following for many weeks; for hyena eats what lion leaves.

T'chackamma led them on. The stars flashed above, and the moon gave them shadows. The shufflings of pads on the dry veldt moved with a vast sigh of breathing. They advanced steadily

and cautiously, although they were several miles from Intaba Kraal, where lived Mijtheer van den Wenter, the farmer who had captured T'chackamma and sold him to a menagerie owner.

Jafta Hallelujah, who lived with a wife in a stone hut in the midst of mountain pastures, had known for weeks that T'chackamma had returned to the mountain, but he had not dared to tell Baas at Intaba Kraal. For Jafta knew whose spirit dwelt in the mortal frame of T'chackamma, a spirit who would be the more terrible if T'chackamma were killed, for then the spirit would be free. To Jafta the Kaffir, who had taken the Holy Bible name of Hallelujah as a protection against as many devils as possible, the baboon was sacred, that is, a revengeful power to be feared and conciliated. Inside the hut Jafta Hallelujah and his wife huddled on their bed strung with thongs of ox-hide, and waited for the first agitated *tottle tonk* of an iron sheep's-bell that would mean that T'chackamma had come.

Miles away, in the homestead of Intaba Kraal the Boer farmer sat before a smouldering fire of dried cow-dung and roots of yellow-bush. His hair was worn long and fell from his forehead down the sides of his long face in lustreless hanks like drying tobacco leaves. A scar, the shape of a stork's foot, drew together the flesh of one cheek: the scar of a clutch by T'chackamma. He munched his meagre supper of griddle cake, baked on the open hearth, and biltong, or sun-

dried strips of meat, and sipped a mug of native beer made from the grain of dura. A barrel of the beer had been brought to the homestead that afternoon, and left in an outhouse. Intaba Kraal was built of mud and thatched with reeds, under the roof of which psalms were sung on Sunday afternoons, and the Bible read aloud to Kaffirs. On week-days the farm business was done, including the kicking of Kaffirs where they felt pain most, on the shins. Mijnheer van den Wenter, like many European colonists, was incapable of believing that a man who was Black was able to appreciate the kindness of a man who was White; hence the boot.

Many dogs padded about Intaba Kraal, big mangy animals which lived on what the Kaffir women did not want, and the vultures did not take, from the knacker-heap away from the farm buildings. They were cattle dogs, for Mijnheer van den Wenter (who had got many gold pieces for T'chackamma) had lately increased his stock. Sometimes when the moon was full these dogs went hunting on the veldt, their leader being Zwart Piet, a cross between boarhound and mastiff, and sire of more than half the dogs of Intaba Kraal. On two nails driven into the ceiling beam in the kitchen rested an old rifle and bayonet, which van den Wenter had taken during the South African War from one of the English prisoners. This weapon had killed subjects both of Queen Victoria and of T'chackamma. A ban-

dolier, rubbed with mutton fat to preserve the leather, hung from another nail, beside the bags of dried herbs used in the cooking pots of the young Kaffir woman who lived in the house.

The moon was just rising when she removed Mijnheer van den Wenter's boots for him, before going to bed. The Boer farmer carried rifle and bandolier upstairs. It had been his custom to lay it along the wall under the head of his bed, loaded, for many years; ever since he had killed a Kaffir who had stolen a case of Schnaps. And on this night, when he heard cries of "Baas! Baas!" and the sound of blows striking the main doors of the building, the first thing he did after the sudden awakening was to lean over and under the edge of the bed until he felt the chill metal of the butt-plate.

With the rifle in one hand he pulled back the heavy dark curtains from the small window, and muttering to the woman to stop her whining, unfastened the leather loop and opened the casement. The head-boy, a Kaffir of nearly sixty years of age, stood below, beating the door with a knobkerrie. "Baas! Baas!" In the clickering jabber of his native tongue he shook out bits of his fearful tale. Baas shouted to him not to be a fool, but to say what was the matter. The head-boy was beseeching the devils not to kill his little children, —the little children being between the ages of six months and forty-three years. While the terrified Kaffir jabbered on his scarred and bony knees,

mixing prayers for his safety to his own particular god and wails to this master not to beat him, a white conical object fluttered past his head, and seeing it, the old man fell with a moaning wail upon his face. The farmer shouted, ¹*Suka bo!* many times, threatening that he would come down with the sjambok and beat him if he did not say what was the matter. When the head-boy saw that it was only Baas' nightcap which had fallen upon him, and not the vengeance of the Alungunyani for coming to tell that the baboons were raiding the outhouses and the mealie fields, his terror went from him, and crying "T'chackamma, Baas, T'chackamma!" he fled.

The young Kaffir girl had made a light, in which the gilt letterings of Scriptural texts in Dutch gleamed on the white-washed walls. He pulled on breeches and socks, thrust arms into coat, and with bandolier and rifle and candle, jumped down the stairs. Feet were stamped into boots on the warm hearthstone. He took a cowhorn from the wall, and running to the door, slid back the wooden bar. All things under the moon were unreal and dim, with blackest cut shapes which were shadows.

He placed the horn to his lips, and blew. He waited less than a second before blowing again and listening for the answering tongues of dogs. Silence, except for a faraway sound like the Deutcher cheer of *hoch!* once. He knew it for the

¹ Get up, blast you.

alarm signal of one of the baboon scouts. He cursed the dogs, the scores of dogs that lived on him and were gone the moment they were needed. Again the alarm horn sounded in the starry night. He imagined the ruin of his crops, while nothing helped him, and started to run towards the large mealie field, blaspheming in his helplessness.

"Zwart Piet!" he yelled, "Zwart Piet! To me, Zwart Piet!" He raved against the mongrel mastiff with the great sullen head, whose teeth more than once had fastened in the heels of strangers' riding boots; and ripped the shoulders of a stranger's horses. "Come to me, Zwart Piet!"

No dog came. The pack was miles away on the veldt, hunting. He went on alone, with long strides of his big lean limbs. He knew his danger, but rage made him heedless. He thought only of shooting T'chackamma, who in the past had torn open hundreds of his lambs for the milk inside them, who with his tribe in one night had destroyed a season's crops.

He was panting when he stopped at a stone wall, on which the moon made shadows of his head and arm and rifle. The mealie field was still in its fixed and soundless extent. Even the mice did not squeak. He rested elbows on the top of the wall until a noise caused the end of the rifle-shadow to slip below on the leaves of the mealies. His forefinger crooked round the trigger, for the noise had been that of an old Kaffir belching—exactly as the drunken Kaffir

Ngoza had done when first he had slashed him with the whip of rhinoceros-hide. While he stood with sweat dripping from under his raised shoulder (for that Kaffir had been flogged to death) the immobility of the field changed one fragment of its bewildering light and shade. A deep harsh cry broke out near him. The cry, so sharp and unexpected, seemed to give life to related patches of darkness. The patches moved with a running rustle of leaves. At once he saw that a bow of his enemies was drawn around him. Some crouched on the wall to the left and right of him, in soundless and threatening attitudes. They crouched so still that he could define them not at all after the first concerted movement. Every shadow was a baboon.

He became afraid. With a weakening feeling of horror he saw two white rings fixed directly in front of him, apparently in the air. They seemed to float in moonlight as they moved forward slowly, without a sound, without a visible movement. He raised the rifle to fire, although he knew that his life would end a moment afterwards. While he stood there, physically unable to press the second joint of finger against the iron, the bow untautened into a ragged roar. He turned and ran. They did not follow. They departed from Intaba Kraal, for their homes in the mountain by way of the pasture land where Jafta Nicodemus on his wood-and-thong bed lay quaking as he waited for the cries of dying sheep to arise in the night.

THE OLD STAG

II

Far above the ravine, over the peaks of the mountains, a bird soared as though unable to descend to heavier airs. Its shadow rushed through the ravine to the lower slopes of the mountain, and over the browning sward in which were embedded rocks. Already the life of the grass was being drawn upwards in a quivering ascent of torrid air, which, like glassy flames without colour, seemed about to melt and crumble the mountain. The sun blistered the sky. Wheeling in this airy place, the bird saw the baboons creeping on the earth as they fed. From nearly two miles above, its eyes could see T'chackamma pulling up stones. Those eyes could look at the sun: they had a third eyelid, a membrane which was like a darkened film. But they rarely looked sunwards. No food on the sun. Food below soon, for it saw the horsemen and dogs approaching the mountain. T'chackamma had not yet seen them. They were ten miles away.

T'chackamma was hungry again, and very thirsty. He left no stone, that was a stone, and not part of the mountain upjutting from the earth, unturned. Even big stones he pulled up, sometimes placing both feet against footholds and tugging with long hairy arms. He was looking for ants. He picked them, cocoons and all, out of the fibrous cavities which were their homes suddenly

disrupted to the glare of the sky. He picked them off in thumbs and first fingers of both hands, and pounded them into paste in his grinder teeth. Every minute about a hundred, kicking and biting and stinging, went into the mouth. Ants were his favourite food.

He fed apart. He stepped as though with caution, sometimes glancing under his arms. An ignorant stranger spying through a telescope might have thought that T'chackamma was peering shyly at the little female following him. But no, T'chackamma was making sure that no one was getting any of the ants he might have missed. And the little baboon following was not a female, but T'je, who in spite of blows and tweaks, persisted in following T'chackamma. He followed him everywhere, filled with admiration, a desire to imitate. Jafta Hallelukah watched him.

T'je, rather stiff with unbloomed bruises and his pelt pitted with old and new holes where the teeth and nails of T'chackamma had dug for various punitive reasons, followed his Chief with many glances of his bright eyes. Barely an assegai's throw divided them. T'je did not get many ants. Yet he got something that Chief had missed, for in wrenching up an insignificant lump of rock, T'je found a scorpion. With glee he flicked it out of its hole. Play first, and thought of how nice it would taste. He picked it up by a leg, and dropped it. He pretended to seize it by the sting in one hand, while he pinched a foreleg

with the other. While amusing himself with the scorpion, he forgot about T'chackamma.

He soon tired of play, and was about to tear out the sting, when he happened to see, out of an eye's corner, that Chief was within two yards of him. T'chackamma walked upon him with exceeding slowness. T'je's mouth opened, and he jibbered, "*Wo! Wi? Wo!*" He swallowed eat-water. He coughed a small cough. He pretended that it was necessary to scratch himself, but after three scrapes decided that the scorpion must be de-stinged immediately. He did so, with trembling fingers, and was jibbering to himself, possibly pretending that he had not seen Chief so near, when a very loud *Hoch!* made him aware that he was expected to look up.

Little T'je looked into the eyes of T'chackamma. Chief's white eyelids disappeared into his wrinkly head, as though with utter amazement at the audacity of T'je in daring to find a scorpion on ground that T'chackamma had passed over. Chief drew in a deep breath, and his eyes drew a thundercloud from somewhere out of the sky and turned it into a gaze upon T'je, who was about to flee with the scorpion to his mother when it was snatched out of his hand and he was bitten through an ear and hurled downhill. With a grunt and a frown T'chackamma watched him going, shook his head slowly, swung round his hindquarters (which pointed upwards) and proceeded to divide the scorpion and to munch the portions. Then

slowly, his pink callosities, naked from so much sitting on hot rocks, wrinkling at every step, he went down for the fourth time to drink water. He had a thirst. He had been very drunk the night before, on the barrel of dura beer found in the outhouse at Intaba Kraal. T'je peered at him from behind a boulder, where he found a lizard, which he promptly ate. Afterwards he too went down to drink (when Chief had gone) and, his thirst quenched, he walked uphill to be near T'chackamma.

It was T'je who, about an hour past noon, gave a barking cry of *boch!* as a warning to his Chief. T'je's cry preceded others by the time of an eye-blink. Baboons ran in their peculiar cantering four-footed shuffle to form a drawn bow, strung tense in common danger, whose arrow of waitfulness was barbed by the scrutiny of T'chackamma acutely immobile on a rock a hundred yards in front of them. They saw horsemen, several native stirrup runners, and a pack of dogs.

They came nearer. T'chackamma crouched on his commanding rock, one foot crossed over the other. His head, which gave him the appearance of having had a boar and a dog for parents, never moved. High above them the vulture on wide-spread wings cut its circles in the blue and open sky. The horsemen dismounted, and climbed the difficult ways in the kopjes of the mountains base. Among the baboons, only T'je moved. He walked forward. He climbed Chief's rock, and

sat on a crag behind him. In attitude he was a small statue of T'chackamma. He scratched himself, as though nothing was happening, even when T'chackamma got down from his rock, and, step by step, walked towards the pack.

T'je watched Chief, wanting to follow him, but held to the rock by a sensation between a thrill and a fear which filled his mouth with eat-water. The more his glance lengthened and shortened between the enemy dogs and Chief, the more T'je was unable to move. He tried to cry out a warning as the dogs, viewing the solitary baboon, bayed together. He could not cry. He gurgled, and gripped the rock in terror when T'chackamma suddenly turned, and at a lumbering gallop came back, passing the rock and leaving him alone. T'je had never expected this! He cried out, but Chief never stopped. T'je wailed in the awfulness of his desolation, and shrieked when the dogs reached the rock and climbed upon the lower natural steps, trying to spring to where he crouched.

Three smaller birds were now watching from the sky. In a lower and hotter air they cut each other's circles of flight above the rock where sat T'je. One of them swooped at his head, and when he looked up he saw eyes with yellow rings and a curved beak and feet with black claws; and when he looked down he saw tongues and fangs and eyes. T'je cried to his mother, he cried to T'chackamma. Chattering through teeth he implored the hawks to fly away; and he told the dogs

that he would tell T'chackamma if they did not stop snarling at him.

Upon other rocks three hundred yards up-mountain the baboons were perched, in their regular defensive formation of a bow so supple that at a command from the leader the ends would draw together in an immediate circular envelopment. The cries of the small baboon came to them with the snarls of the farm dogs.

T'chackamma barked.

Twenty-three grown baboons and a dozen youngsters climbed down and walked forward two hundred yards. T'chackamma walked before them, in the centre of the bow.

The patriarch, who had reckoned the numbers of his enemies when he had gone forward alone, continued to advance leisurely on all fours when the baboons of the defensive bow stopped and mounted rocks. T'chackamma carried his tail at first curved upwards, and then hanging down. As he neared the foremost dogs that tail swung left and right, moving with his gaze and the shifting of his feet.

He walked slowly, almost leisurely. Sometimes he stopped to beat the earth with his hands. Step by step the distance between baboon and pack was shortened. The bow behind drew into an arc of warning. Its end began to outflank the pack. T'chackamma's eyes never blinked as his gaze swung over the faces of the dogs. *Pat-pat-pat* of hands on the brown and brittle grass, where

in stony fragments glinted metallic ores. Slowly he walked nearer. As he approached Zwart Piet, the purple naked patches of his face deepened in hue. He was very angry. The dogs drew back, snarling and bristling. They were afraid. He was terrible and quiet. A shadow fled over the ground before him, flung down from where the vulture soared.

Slower and slower the big baboon walked towards the rock where the little baboon was crouched. He moved forward, alone with his shadow, swinging left, swinging right, swinging left, swinging right, and in a sudden dust leapt over the head of Zwart Piet, and was beside T'je, and had knocked him on the head as a warning to cling to his rescuer in absolute obedience.

Zwart Piet, the colour of dirt, ugly and strong and fearless, stirred the pack into a dusty upheaval of tails and teeth and hackles. With T'je clinging to his neck and held in his left arm, T'chackamma looked at them. The gaze of his close-set eyes fell upon Zwart Piet, and they opened wide, while his head went up and his mouth opened. He barked.

The bark appeared to break into fragments against the rocks whereon the warriors sat. Flying chips seemed to detonate in the sunshine. After the cracks one baboon sprang into the air and caught its tail as though it would climb up its own spine. Another baboon screamed as it rolled off a rock, to twitch and lie still across an

ant's highway below. Another, who had been yawning, ceased to yawn, and with a drowsy mutter lay down as though to sleep.

Baboons quitted their seats in a panic. Another volley was fired. The defensive bow formation was broken, as the females and young retired before the males. T'chackamma looked down at the dogs, and at the fleeing tribe. He sat still with T'je and gazed at the lengthening distance. A shot struck the rock at his feet and whined over his head in ricochet. With T'je in his left arm, suddenly he sprang among them, bounding through the way which opened in their midst, and with the pack at his tail, galloped towards the fugitives.

His pace on three pads, instead of four, was slow. Zwart Piet headed him off, and he turned to the left, towards the ravine, making for Lamm'gei's rock, where he could climb to safety. The dogs gained on him so swiftly that they pulled him down by the tail as he reached the pinnacle, whose base was strewn with the fragments of old bones.

High above him, from the terraces and ledges before the Cave of Bats, the females and young of the tribe looked down upon him. The vulture soared level with them, watching fourteen dogs attacking the baboon, and waiting for the flesh of the slain.

The tails of the mongrels, of many hues and shapes, some short and bushy, others long and

mangy, waved as though from the hindquarters of headless dogs. Their bristling backs heaved. A bass vibrating sound, neither growl nor snarl nor howl, came from the pack. It was as though much water was boiling under the rock. It was the sound of worrying, for a boarhound, brother of Zwart Piet, had got its teeth in the skin of T'chackamma's throat, and other teeth were biting upon the body. Dog-teeth bit dog in the excitement of the easy victory. Baboon-teeth gnashed on bone, and the nerves of the brown-nicked incisors, inflamed by the drunken night-before, released a spasm of strength that empowered him to turn in a somersault, and kick, with his hind-legs, the boarhound into the abyss. Upright again, he let out a bellow.

Without pausing, the mastiff sprang at T'chackamma, who tightened his legs for a leap sideways from his sitting position, in order to have his back guarded by Lamm'gei's Rock. T'je, who all the time had been clasped and protected, leaned out of his arm-chair and snapped at the mastiff in its mid-air spring, and bit its tail. Zwart turned his lined and sullen face upon the little baboon, and would have had T'je out and under his forelegs while he tore his throat, *if* T'chackamma had remained where he was; but T'chackmama had leapt, and taken T'je with him.

Back to the wall, he faced thirteen dogs, twelve of them quailing when they saw his black head set, almost without neck, upon his terrific

shoulders. He patted the ground with one hand, as though with irritable impatience. He turned his inflamed eyes, in their white circles of creased skin, from one to another. They feared to attack him, and infuriated by their barking, he put T'je behind him, ran forward, snatched a dog, and threw it over the precipice. Jafta Hallelujah saw it falling. They rushed upon him, trying to fix their teeth in his legs and thighs, and springing for his head. He clasped one in each arm, biting left and right, and so powerful the muscles of his jaws that both their spinal columns were broken. He flung them after the other corpses. Zwart Piet tore a mouthful of skin from his belly, and, avoiding the death-hug of the long arms, ran back, to await a better chance. T'chackamma embraced another dog, who before dying fastened its teeth in his left hand, cracking three of the finger bones. As he dropped it a frothing muzzle thrust over the lolling head of the slain, and bit T'je in the leg. T'chackamma leaned over and paralysed it by biting through the nerve at the base of the skull; and even as they hesitated, he picked up the body and flung it at Zwart Piet.

T'je, crouched behind his Chief, was gibbering in pain and fear. T'chackamma stood on a raised platform of rock, his eyes smeared with the gore of his enemies, and his own blood welling from many bites. A swarm of flies buzzed about his ragged coat. Seven of his enemies were slain.

The others ran at him together. He met them with open jaws and arms, and bit thrice. Three dogs fell back and spun crookedly as they tried to lick away the agony in three splintered thighbones. The baboon took one in a grasp upon the scruff of the neck that tore hair from skin, pulled it to him, bit through the neck, and fell over, panting.

He pushed himself back on to three limbs, while T'je cowered under him, and he was almost balanced for a sitting position when Zwart Piet ran in upon him with lowered head and set his teeth in T'chackamma's thigh. The baboon roared, and bent over to bite the mastiff. His teeth snapped on the steel studs of the thick leather collar, and with all the power of his jaws he tried to bite through it. He broke some teeth, and unable to make the mastiff loosen its hold, he seized the head and wrenched it away, and sank back afterwards, with the sinews of his thigh stripped from the muscles by the clenching teeth. Another dog mouthed at his right flank, but fell back in its own fear, to lie with the other dogs ten yards off, and pant and watch T'chackamma.

Dwarfed shadows began to creep out of the bases of rocks, and to spread over the hot ground. Below on the slopes, where the advance line of the baboons had squatted, three bodies lay and stank in the sunshine. Each body was marked for the great soaring bird by two dark lines extending away from it. The ants were busy, one dark column approaching empty-jawed, the other stag-

gering along the return track with chunks and masses of rich food for the store-houses. They hurried twenty abreast up and down the tracks. The bird did not dare to alight near one of the bodies and feed while the ants were there. It would carry up the bones and drop them for their marrow when the ants had finished in a few hours time. It ceased to watch the ants, and soared above its own rock, watching for movement below.

It had no sense of time. The shadows grew wider and softer. Dogs slunk off down the mountain, hiding when they saw their master coming up. The bird circled unwearied in the cool air. T'chackamma's head was hanging on his breast, as he squatted still, holding T'je in one arm. Flies settled and swarmed in heavy clusters as they blew their eggs on his wounds. The mastiff was lying down five yards from him, in a splash of its own drying blood. It lay as though dozing, but it was watching the baboon through one eye.

And then the bird came down. It had a span of more than three yards, a dark grey back and tawny breast. In ponderous slowness it alighted on the whitened pinnacle of rock above them. It was dreadful and old. Its narrow head, so small in proportion to its body, was bare of feathers, and the bright scarlet rings round its scabby eyes gave it a mean and wicked look. It stared at T'chackamma, and blinked, and opened its beak

and screamed a miserable and whining cry—the cry of Lamm'gei the vulture, who knocked sheep over precipices, who tore sods from the earth for its nest, who carried up tortoises and dropped them to break their shells. The bones it had cracked would have girdled the base of the mountain. On the rock Lamm'gei sat and blinked, and waited.

Zwart Piet laid his head on his paws again, and groaned through a mask of flies. T'je slept. T'chackamma's head swivelled slowly round until it was fallen on his chest.

The action of Lamm'gei unfolding great wings and jumping off the pinnacle some time later made T'chackamma look up again. At the same moment Zwart Piet tottered upon his legs, and howled. His tail began to wag in the flopping irregular motion of a compound fracture. One of his ears hung below his jowl. T'chackamma's clutch, T'chackamma the Terrible! With a ragged tongue he tried to lick his master's hand. He fell over.

"Ah-ha!" cried van den Wenter, his grip tightening on the rifle. He had climbed the higher slopes, sniping as he climbed. He knew the risks, but his crops had been ruined. Rage drove out fear. With loaded rifle he moved upon T'chackamma, and raising it, took aim and fired. As the bullet, its blunt head nicked with a cross, spun through the baboon, it split and opened, and passed out of the back by a hole as big as a man's

fist. The Boer ejected the brass case, and fumbled in the bandolier for another cartridge. When he had reloaded, he stared at T'chackamma, who had made no movement, except for a shudder when the dumdum bullet had struck him. T'je clung to him, and whimpered.

The Boer advanced upon what he thought to be a baboon mortally stricken. Holding the bayonet before him, he advanced upon T'chackamma, whom he recognised by the collar. The baboon sat with fallen head, one arm limp beside him. The mastiff moved forward with his master. The man walked nearer, cautiously, step by step. When his enemy was near, T'chackamma's eyes filled with life, and he sprang, and the point of the bayonet pierced his throat.

Tearing it out, he seized the muzzle of the rifle as the trigger was pulled, and lurched upon the man, his ears ringing with the detonation. Wheezing through the pierced windpipe, he wrenched the rifle from his enemy's hand, meaning to rip him as he had ripped Zwart Piet, with the thumbnails of his hands. Those nails had once slashed open a lion. They were sharp and jagged as broken glass. And his feet were like his hands; he could pull four ways at once. The Boer screamed as a hand fell on his shoulder and the cloth of his coat broke; but T'chackamma was coughing and wheezing, and his hand slipped off the shoulder as he sank to the ground, still holding T'je. At his master's feet the mastiff was shiver-

ing and groaning as he tried in vain to climb over the fallen body and fix his teeth in T'chackamma's throat. T'je gibbered at him, and presently jumped on his back and bit him, and Zwart Piet died.

Van den Wenter's leg was held by the baboon's hand, and to free it, he picked up the rifle and brought down the butt-plate on its wrist. He was unplucking the fingers from their grasp when a shadow of spread wings glided upon him, and Lamm'gei with its talons knocked him over the precipice.

Jafta Hallelujah saw him hurtling down, and he knew that it was the vengeance of the *alungu-nyani*, the dreadful baboon gods, who had sent Lamm'gei the Bearded to the help of T'chackamma. The old Kaffir declared that T'chackamma climbed with T'je to the Cave of Bats, leaving the young baboon to be tended by the females there, and passing beyond the grey-haired guardian of the inner cave, who was blind, he lay down and slept into death among the bones of his ancestors. Jafta told me that the baboons never raided Intaba Kraal again, for the homestead fell into ruin, prickly pears and weeds grew in the mealie fields, and no one came to claim it. It was well that it should return to wildness, the old man muttered, for the spirit of T'chackamma, which was the spirit of Ngoza, the Kaffir sjamboked to death by Baas years before, would never leave at peace any white man who dwelt under the mountain.

CHAKCHEK'S RAID ON LONDON

Again the dark sharp-winged bird cut a swift air-circle round the petrified figure standing on the column one hundred and forty five feet above the earth. The figure was eighteen feet tall, and wore cocked hat, coat, knee-breeches, and shoes, all of stone. Sightlessly it stared, fixed and immobile, alone in the sky, the southern sun shining on its smoke-dark face. Thus had it been staring many years over the highway, on which proceeded perpetual lines of horse and motor traffic. Below the column were four bronze lions. Two fountains were playing. A dissonant hum of engines arose from the highway, up and down which thousands of men and women were hurrying.

Not one of the hurrying men and women looked up at the statue or saw the sharp speck flying in a circle above the monument to a dead Admiral. The bronze lions were nothing to them, because they were not symbolic of the natural human spirit. These people were of a great town-civilisation, whose human spirit was suppressed by a mind-layer of false thought. They believed newspapers, and hated others they had never seen. Many had forgotten the sky, and the green earth wearied them.

The gaze of the people was on the pavements

and no higher than omnibus driver or pedestrian immediately approximate. And at the moment most of them thought hatefully and scornfully of another nation, as that nation thought hatefully and scornfully of them. Among these people, determined in a conviction of their national righteousness, were many civil servants from the War and Admiralty Offices going to lunch in restaurants in the Strand, and old men wearing uniforms, whose heels flashed.

The agitated streams of moving hats on the pavements, the dark dots passing through the traffic, the coloured motor-buses and cabs, were ignored by the bird above. The hum and shimmer and shuffle uprising in a hundred confused echoes smote continuously upon his senses of sight and sound, but he accepted them calmly as he had accepted the rivers and woods and towns over which he had passed since his escape from his master in Devon. He was Wizzle of the Chakcheks, a half-trained peregrine falcon. More than two centuries before one of his ancestors had killed rooks which lived in the trees whose roots now rotted under the asphalt walks of Trafalger Square, which was then called Porridge Island in the village of Charing.

He flew with quick flutterings of pointed wings, followed by short level glides. His scaly yellow legs, with their four toes and black sickle-claws, were pressed into the brown plumage of his belly. His beak was blue and pointed. He had black

patches on his cheeks. His eyes showed him to be noble; indeed, an English king had once conferred an earldom on one of his ancestors; his eyes were large and fierce and proud, of a beautiful brown, with liquid blue-black pupils. He was the last of the Chakchek family, peregrine falcons whose eyrie for centuries had been upon Bone Ledge, a hundred feet down a Devon sea-precipice. He was Wizzle, son of the One-Eyed.

He flew seven hundred feet above Whitehall, seeing below him an immense wilderness of buildings, an immense spreading patch whose edges were lost in grey smoke rising in the windless air from a million chimneypots. He saw the river crossed by many bridges, its wide and silver flowing broken by tugs and barges, and its banks overcrowded with wharves and cranes, and tangled with spars and rigging. He climbed to a thousand feet, flying at sixty miles an hour, and turned suddenly by opening and depressing the stiff feathers of his tail, so that with a hissing of air he was flung up in a loop, at the top of which he rolled over, facing Trafalgar Square, and pointing at the figure on the top of the column. With wings half closed the tiercel slanted down from the sky at a hundred miles an hour, breaking his point just before the statue by using wings and tail as brakes, thrusting out spread yellow feet, and alighting on the admiral's cocked hat with a tinkle of the silver bell tied to one leg. He preened the long flight quills of his wings, drawing

them through his beak and smoothing the ruffled filaments. When he had made these airworthy he preened his tail feathers in the same way, and cleaned his breast and toes. Afterwards he shook himself, stretched pinions and legs, and looked at the strange wilderness around and under him.

Immediately below the statue was a wide ledge, and on this were lying hundreds of skeletons and claws and scattered bones. And there were skulls, most of them about an inch and a half long, but there were smaller, blunter skulls as well. For this was a dying-place of London's birds. It was nearest the sky, and no bird likes to die on the ground. Here pigeons and sparrows who found their food in the Square flew with last wingbeats when they felt the world they knew passing away from them. There was the body of a humble-bee lying on its side by a sparrow skull, with frayed vanes folded tranquilly over its black and gold body. It had died that morning, having come to London in a Kentish flower waggon, wearily clinging in the starlit frosty night to an aster flower. The beams of the sun had given it enough strength to fly up, but its spirit had gone back to the happy meadows as its body dropped on the ledge.

Suddenly the perching bird stiffened. A flock of pigeons had flown up from somewhere behind the Admiralty Arch. He was not hungry, having gorged himself on a chicken taken from a garden

in Woking half-an-hour previously. In the arrogance of his young life he stared at them. They floated to the Square, with wings held at a high angle. He watched with fierce eyes all their movements. They fluttered round a woman who held a paper bag, from which she took handfuls of maize to scatter for them. The pigeons walked quickly on the asphalt, picking up the grains and having no fear of the idlers. She held out a palmful and two birds perched on her wrist. Then something little, which had been standing like a tree-stump rooted in the pavement, with a paper-bill stuck to it, became alive, and slouched big-booted to her. It wore a dented bowler hat with a brass band shining with the letters STAR round the crown. It had fed many generations of pigeons with corn on the brim of that official hat. The woman dropped a trickle of maize over it. Three birds fluttered round it. One perched on the crown. The tree-stump became human. It smiled. It held newspapers under one arm, and cried *Brisbarmgravictryspesbl*.

The tiercel fixed the pigeon on the hat with the stereoscopic sight of his eyes, leaned forward, and slipped off his perch. He fell almost perpendicularly, with wings arched back, sharply, like the barbs of an iron arrowhead. He fell thus half the height of the Nelson Column, and then he opened and beat his wings, swooping low and fast just above the heads of two uniformed Eastern Telegraph boys. A sparrow sipping water on the stone

edge of the fountain basin saw him, and fell into the water with fright. The newspaper seller, faithful purveyor of racing selections during thousands of lunch-hours, patron of pigeons and worthy citizen, was offering his double news-sheet which told of the *British Army's Great Victory—Special*—to a pale-faced shipping clerk, when the bird on his hat was knocked three yards in a horizontal direction towards Cockspur Street, and half a hundred pigeons and a dozen sparrows on the ground scattered like spoke-splinters and felloes of a grey limber-wheel struck by a noiseless shell.

No one with human intelligence knew what had happened. The pigeon was picked up in one place, and its head several paces beyond, where it had rolled. Its crop was ripped open, and maize-berries fell out. The shipping clerk asked if it were dead.

"Dead?" replied one of the cheeky Telegraph boys, "what yer fink 'e is? Springcleaning 'isself?"

A tall policeman strolled over with noiseless tread, controlled and immaculate. The newspaper man held out the decapitated pigeon, an appealing look on his barky face. A dozen voices tried to tell the policeman what had happened. Someone suggested it must have been shot. Someone else said a stone must have been thrown at it. An office boy munching a beef sandwich tried to assume a knowing expression, as though to direct upon himself the prominence of suspicion. He

was an opportunist with imagination, as yet undeveloped, and he was being wasted as an envelope flap-licker and stamp-thumper. Another individual suggested that a German spy was concealed among the chimneypots, sniping with an air-gun the military staff of the War Office. Hearing this, a territorial rifleman with blistered feet, recruit of three days training (it was the September of Nineteen Fourteen) looked alarmed, and the policeman produced his note book. A crowd of several hundreds had been formed. The policeman ordered people to move on, and they shuffled a few feet. The crowd blocked the road, and immediately the fluid traffic lines began to coagulate. The word *Germans* made a sibilance on the tongues of the people.

Soon the people wandered away, the traffic pulsed again up and down Whitehall, Cockspur Street, and the Strand; back went the notebook into the policeman's breast pocket. The paper "boy" rolled the body of the pigeon in one of the news-bills of the lunch edition of the *Star*, and put it in his pocket, muttering "lor, won't it be lovely in a poie for Sunday's dinner! lor, won't it taste lovely!" Sparrows and pigeons came back to the Square, and the fountains splashed in the great stone basins, casting sun-dogs out of the rising waterspray which the passersby did not see.

That afternoon Wizzle stooped at three pigeons from the gilt cross on the dome of St. Paul's Cathedral, losing the first bird, striking the second

above an omnibus but missing a clutch, so that it hit the wooden surface of the street with such force that it bounced a yard. The third he missed in his first plunge but recovering immediately he circled under it and drove it up to an altitude about thrice the height of the cathedral. Then his relentless round-and-round tactics changed; the steady beating of his wings became agitated; with a burst of speed he dashed at the tail of the dingy pigeon, who towered and escaped, to fall towards a retreat below the lead dome where scores of its brethren were crouching. Wizzle fell upon it before it had dropped two hundred feet, and the people watching below saw the two birds meet and become one which faded into the dome, leaving only feathers in the air where they had apparently joined.

Wizzle stood on the small pigeon, descendant of a stock dove, and plucked, skinned, and ate it. He tore the flesh from the frame, often pausing to peer from the ledge as though fearing disturbance. What he left ten minutes later weighed about an ounce—tail and pinion feathers, part of the breastbone, mandibles and part of the skull-bone, legbones, feet, and gizzard.

For two days he harried the pigeons of St. Paul's Cathedral, and then he left, making a temporary roost in one of the elms of Hyde Park. He killed a green woodpecker as it was pushing itself up a trunk with its pointed tail feathers, to the excitement of a falcon-eyed, white-

bearded man who had been watching it through glasses; for the old gentleman had been observing birds in Hyde Park for many years, and he knew that the peregrine falcon was a rare visitor¹. In this pleasaunce a grey American squirrel ceased to live, after a chase among yellowing leaf-patches and a bounding run among the grasses that ended in sharp death for one of the invading tribe which had helped decimate the brown English squirrel.

Other strange things happened. The sexton of a church at Hampstead was surprised one morning to find the remains of a bantam cock lying on one of his tombs; but he was not more surprised than the gunner subaltern at the R.A. mess, Woolwich, whose horse shied and threw him during a canter round Blackheath when a rook sprawled through the air, broken backed, and fell just before its nose. The striking-down of the rook from eleven hundred feet took place less than a quarter of an hour after Wizzle had flown up from the cockerel, and as Hampstead is some miles to the north-west of Piccadilly, and Blackheath is some miles to the south-east, one may estimate his roving pace.

He had no fixed eyrie or base; he was not yet mated; three months ago he had been a helpless and weak eyas upon Bone Ledge, watched over and fed by Mousing Keekee, the childless kestrel hawk who had adopted him. For a few weeks he hunted in Greater London, and many adventures

¹ This old gentleman bore a resemblance to the late W. H. Hudson.

he had, including a terrible minute when near Eltham he stooped at the decoy-bird of a netter, tied to a post in a waste land to attract passing finches. For the netter concealed behind a bush jerked the cord to release the clap net, which held him captive. Wizzle's hind claw missed the decoy-bird, a bullfinch, but so great was the terror of the little bird that it fell into a swoon, and hung by one frail leg from its foul perch. The netter, an unshaven and insignificant individual who worked for a maculate Yiddish "birdfancier" in Whitechapel, ran forward to see what strange thing was struggling in his net. It was a bird with eyes fiercer than any he had seen before, with yellow legs trousered with feathers, gripping the meshes by sharp black claws. The sight of the silver bell made him imagine that it was a rare kind of parrot escaped from a cage, and he thought of a reward.

He was afraid to take it in his hands, and went back to his hiding place behind a willow stole to fetch the sacking with which he covered the cages when he travelled—for magistrates had been known to fine trappers the sum of half-a-crown and more for breaking the law that protected the nation's wild songsters from ravagement by mercenary wretches. He had two cages, of wood and iron wire, nine inches long, five inches wide, and eight inches high. He had twelve linnets and two goldfinches in one, and nine chaffinches in the other, all struggling to escape, clawing one

another, beating wings and pushing blooded beaks through the bars to find a way to the wandering air and the thistleheads.

He knelt by the net through which Wizzle was trying to thrust himself with foot and pinion. He smothered him with the sacking, and lifted the cane hoop of the net. The talons of one foot pierced the sacking and the skin of the thumb of the dirty hand pressing upon it, but the netter, thinking of his luck and determined not to lose the "parrot," held on. The thorn-prick tightened, and was as the piercing of steel fish-hooks. He threw the other piece of sacking over the head, grasped it firmly, released the hold of his other hand, and sought to draw Wizzle from the net.

But Wizzle was held to the net by his clutch on the sacking through the meshes. He threshed so powerfully with his wings that the netter became afraid and tried to smother him in the covering by which he held his head. To do this he had to shift his hold, and immediately he did so Wizzle bit him in the index finger, breaking the nail. In pain the man snatched away his hand, bringing the beak near his face. Wizzle struck with a taloned foot at his ear, and clenched; at the same time he nicked with his beak and ripped the flesh under the cheekbone. The man shut his eyes, threw away the bird, and hid his face in his arms; then blundering to his feet he ran to his hiding place, his boots snapping and tearing the meshes of his net. He kicked over one of the cages, and

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the door opened, releasing linnets and goldfinches which fluttered away with sweet twitters of joy. The chaffinches remained, however, and eventually they were taken to an East-end slum, where some were blinded with red-hot needles to make their song brighter, where their feather-colours faded, and where those that did not die of a broken heart (being older birds) lived in tiny cages and ate seed and sang and sang and sang to blackened heaven. . . .

For a week more Wizzle remained near London, and during that time he hunted a stretch of the Thames some miles above Richmond, where among the reeds of the eyots thousands of swallows were gathered for the autumnal migration. There was another bird preying upon the pilgrims, a bird swift as Wizzle, and very much like him in shape, but smaller. He weighed nine ounces. The stranger was about twelve inches long, with white neck and chin and black cheeks; he had a yellowish-white breast streaked broadly with brown, and his back was the colour of dark slate. He had the magnificent eyes of the noble falcons, the bluish curved beak with the notch, and yellow skin, or cere, round its base. He used to dash into the twittering clouds of swallows and seize one. Sometimes the chosen bird dodged him, but the little pirate, who was one of the rare Hobby falcons, would follow its every twist and turn and tumble until with a sudden stroke he caught it. Wizzle's way was not the hobby's

CHAKCHEK'S RAID ON LONDON

way, for when he missed his swallow in the first swoop he used to leave it, and pursue another.

One afternoon as he was flying over Richmond Bridge he saw a long formation of birds in the air about a mile from him. The formation was constantly changing. As the birds wheeled in unison their broad wings made the flight like an eyebrow above the horizon; but after the turning movement it became as a string of dust. They were peewits, or green plover, which had come from the snows of Scandinavia to the English autumn ploughlands so rich with worm and grub. The leaders dived sougling over a field, and the birds sank down together. Their plumage was a harmony of tarnished green, black, white, and brown, and each bird had a plume on its poll. They ran to their feeding, all running one way, and suddenly the thousand birds ceased movement, for Wizzle was above them.

He stooped, and they took to the air. He cut in among them, and missed his bird, for it tumbled out of the air-path of his swoop. He looped and cut at it again, and it fled before him, twisting and tumbling, the spread tips of its flight quills making a gruff noise. Four times Wizzle slid down in his half-point at the plover, and then he gave up the chase and followed another bird. This was one of the season's youngsters, and it was not so quick at twisting as an old bird. It was struck underneath by the tiercel who had turned on his back, and the two hind-talons ripped half the

feathers from its breast; its wings became workless, and as it dropped limp it was clutched and borne to the middle of the field, and eaten.

For several days the swallows gathered in the river eyots made their false starts in migration, and every hour new wanderers from the north joined the excited throng. The red sun going down in the west made them strangely agitated, and one morning when the life-giver came up beyond the sea at the Thames mouth they were gone. The hobby was gone too, and all the long and weary journey down the west coasts of France and Spain, and so to Africa, over the deserts and the mountains, it followed with other hobbies, harrying the blue birds who bring happiness to our countryside in Spring.

Wizzle had set out on a journey before them, and he did not return to the Devon precipice of his birth until he had girdled the earth in flight. For he was a peregrine, which means wanderer; and one night, when out of the brands on the hearth arise gold antlers and wings and talons of flame, and the roar of the Atlantic is carried up the valley by the wind mumbling in the chimney, and the pots of ale are warm by the fire, I will tell of his strange homecoming.

THE YELLOW BOOTS

Unlike many Hunts, the Inclefell Harriers—who also hunted fox—held a meet on the day before their annual Hunt Ball, and not the day after. The meet on the morning of the last Hunt Ball will be remembered long. The mounted followers and those on foot waited till midday, but no pack was led to the cross-roads. The meet had been advertised in the local papers to be held at eleven o'clock. At a quarter to twelve about one-third of the field, including every farmer, had gone homewards. A few minutes after noon Jim Huggins rode up. He was the huntsman, an old and fog-seasoned man. In his high voice he said that he had been sent to say, with the Master's compliments, that the meet was cancelled. That was all. In answer to questions, he made but one reply—"I don't know, s'm." It was his habit to address both ladies and gentlemen as "s'm." He never said "sir" or "ma'm."

"But what's happened, Jim? Anything the matter with hounds?"

He sat upright and still on his stocky bay cob.

"I don't know, s'm."

"But how extraordinary! Are they sick?"

A week ago they had been fed on donkey flesh, and had fought in the kennels, all the way to

the meet, and even when drawing covert. The unusual diet had been the cause of many jokes.

"I don't know, s'm."

"Is General Inclefell all right?"

They walked their hunters nearer to him. They were made curious by his rigid reticence.

"I don't know, s'm."

He shifted slightly on his right thigh the angle of his whip.

"You don't know! Haven't you seen the Master this morning, Jim?"

The kennels, and the huntsman's cottage, were in a wood two hundred yards behind the Manor.

"Not this morning, s'm. Second footman came with the General's message, s'm."

"Have you seen Miss Mollie?"

She was the honorary whipper-in to her father's hounds.

"Not this morning, s'm."

Jim in his green cap and green coat sat his bay cob, looking straight ahead, avoiding every eye. He was like a gnarled and mossy limb of one of the dwarf oaks of Wistman's Wood—trees rooted on Dartmoor, thick as they are tall, which were ancient before Doomsday.

The voice of a boy said timidly,

"Plaize, zur, us didden hear no dogs zinging this morning."

"Hold your rattle, young tacker!" commanded Jim Huggins in the sharp, hound-rating voice he had not used since whiphood days. Only his jaw

moved; the mist of breath vanished in the cold air. He looked at his horses's ears. People exchanged glances. The tacker was abashed. His father was a cowman on the Home Farm of the Manor. He lived near the kennels, whence had come no singing of hounds that morning.

"Good day, s'm," said Jim, raising his cap, laying the near reins on the horse's neck and pressing its off flank with his calf. The cob turned with smart obedience, and trotted home. The word "extraordinary" was ejaculated by nearly everyone present in the saddle.

That night, while people were arriving at the Bedford Hotel in Tavistock for the Hunt Ball, the Secretary—"Pops" Russell, who often said that Life would be a bore without hunting, billiards, and Bass's beer—was surrounded in the lounge by many black- and pink- and green-coated friends, to whom he told the astounding news that neither Bimbo nor Moll was coming that evening.

"But, Pops, old man, what's up with Bimbo? What's all the mystery about?"

Bimbo was the name by which the Master was known to his friends.

"Asked me to tell you he was awful sorry, but he isn't feeling very fit."

"And Moll?"

"Same, 'parently."

Everyone was discussing the peculiar happening. Somehow by supper-time it was known that

the entire pack had been destroyed. It was incomprehensible, for the Master was known everywhere for his fatherly tenderness to the hounds. However, the dance went merrily on. The band was voted a good one.

At two o'clock in the morning "Pops" Russell and three of his pals were drinking in the bar. The middle-aged Secretary was drinking his thirteenth bottle of Bass.

"What's the mystery, Pops?" asked "Naps" Spreycombe, M.F.H. in another country.

"Rioted," replied Captain Russell, staring at the lethargic bubbles rising to the flattened froth half-way down his glass. He was an honest man who disliked subterfuge, but he had to lie. "I suppose its bound to get known, anyhow. Won't do hunting any good."

With a sudden movement he emptied his glass. "Don't tell anyone—told you. Sheep! Bimbo's poisoned 'em, every dog and every little bitch. Cyanide of potassium."

"Strewth," drawled Spreycombe. "What about the Committee? And subscribers?"

"That's the very devil of it," muttered the secretary, "I shall have the dirty work of explaining to subscribers. Bimbo's got enemies, and they're not his own hounds—or weren't, I should say. There'll be the very devil if anyone gets nasty."

"Was it that run on Monday, when they got lost in the mist?" enquired a young man wearing the uniform of the Lamerton Hunt.

Captain Russell nodded.

"Put up hare, changed to a screaming scent up by Links Tor—must have been fox, I think—disappeared into the mist. Jim couldn't find'm. Stragglers began to come into kennels about eight hours after. Moll heard 'm in Tavy Cleave, and saw 'm eating sheep. Everyone of 'm eating. Once get the flavour of hot mutton, and it's all up with your chance of catching fox or hare. Myself I believe it was that dem donkey flesh."

The next day the *West Country Morning News* published a statement, displayed prominently, that Major-General T. F. M. Inclefell, C.M.G., D.S.O., the Master of the Inclefell Harriers, had destroyed the entire pack for sheep-worrying. It was followed, in the issues of succeeding days, by an extended correspondence. General Inclefell was accused of acting hastily; he was held blameworthy for the faulty and irregular feeding of hounds in kennels. The incident was amplified into a general attack upon fox- and hare- and stag-hunting. A letter signed W. H. Starcross, Lt.-Col., R.E., complained of the expense the writer "had undergone in bringing hunters to the district and the enforced dismissal of his two temporary grooms in the worst part of the winter consequent upon the folly of General Inclefell shown by the needless and callous annihilation of the innocent hounds with the guilty." The Secretary replied, stating that he had searched the Army List, and his Subscribers' List, and had been

unable to find the name of W. H. Starcross in either.

This surprised everyone, except the writer of the letter, an eighteen-year-old youth named Cocks, a mechanic to an unqualified dentist, whose hunting experiences were confined to (1) Stalking lovers in summer evening fields, and (2) Stamping mice to death during the threshing of a corn-rick in his uncle's farmyard. The smart youth told me this himself.

There were letters from *Not a Nut-Eater*, who wrote about the "Appalling danger of Rabies *via* the butcher's shop"; from *Dog-Lover*, who wrote "on behalf of poor little dogs who cannot defend themselves"; from *Only a Schoolgirl*—"We of the Upper Fifth have had a debate, and we have decided to let it be known that it was a jolly rotten thing to kill hounds. *Two blacks never yet made a white*, was our unanimous conclusion"; and from indignant butchers in Plymouth, answering the allegations of *Not a Nut-Eater*. And various others. Some funny, some silly; but all based upon ignorance.

Every letter was read in the West Country Club with great interest and often amusement, except by the humourless Captain Russell, the Secretary of the packless Hunt. His ruddy face appeared every day for its morning Basses, which were drunken, as usual, under the stuffed badger in the case above the fireplace. Often he declared that he wasn't interested in what was said, and as often he spent the morning morosely interested

in what was said. He knew the main facts about the run in moorland fog, as told by a pale Molly Inclefell to her father in the evening of the disastrous Monday; and they were quite different from the explanation given at the Extraordinary General Meeting a few days later. It was remarked by a lady immediately after this meeting that the Master had looked "positively uneasy, when that objectionable little bouncy Potstacker person got up on his hind legs" and demanded the name of the farmer to whom compensation would be paid for the loss of sheep by worrying. The Master said that he would personally investigate and settle all claims. Mr. Potstacker, a lawyer employed by a *clique* of subscribers, repeated that he would very much like the meeting to know the name of the farmer who had lost sheep by worrying. The Master replied in a voice weary but courteous that the Scotch sheep on the moors roamed at large; that some time must elapse before any loss would be discovered. Mr. Potstacker would suggest that all claims that were to be made, had been notified already. The secretary then got up and said that surely everybody except the only non-subscriber present had been able to grasp what the Master had just told the meeting: that the committee would be called upon to examine no claims whatsoever, in respect of sheep worried by the pack. And further, he himself, as Secretary, would announce that the Master, whom he understood to be about to offer

his resignation to the Committee, which, in passing, he would say, he hoped would not be accepted, he meant to say, the Master, one of the best of sportsmen, had told him that he would furthermore guarantee the cost of a new pack. He sat down, feeling hot. Mr. Potsacker said he would suggest that the price of new hounds would be the only expense to be borne by the Master and that he would further suggest that the Master might possibly have had another reason than the one given for the slaughtering of the hounds. . . . Voices said, "Oh, shut up." "Put a curb in his mouth, someone," and "Sit down, sit down." Captain Russell jumped on his feet and said, "Mean to say I'm a liar?" Mr. Potstacker said, "Certainly not, Mr. Secretary. I am seeking information. Now, I see many farmers present, men who call a spade a spade. . . ." (A quiet voice: "Us calls'n shovels, maister," and laughter) . . . "Well, shovels. Now farmers are exact in what they say; they insist on a shovel being called a shovel." And when the loud laughter of only the farmers had ceased, Mr. Potstacker said distinctly, "Who among you lost sheep by worrying last Monday?" He looked round. "No one claims a loss! Well then. Who among you has counted your sheep?" Many gave an immediate "Aiy, aiy!" At this point Mr. Potstacker was called to order, and told curtly to address his questions to the chair. "Dem swine," Captain Russell was heard to mutter.

Mr. Potstacker knew that no sheep had been killed. He had been making enquiries; but he had learned only negative information. And after the meeting, although he tried to pump old Jimmy Huggins, he got nothing from him. "Warn't ee to the meeting, s'm?" Jimmy murmured plainly. "Aw, ee missed a rare lot o' rattling; but I be dalled if I knaws what 'twas all about." Yet even Jimmy, close and firm as a Wistman oak, didn't know everything.

This is what had occurred.

The cracked tenor bell of the church had ceased its fringing hum when a man crawled furtively through the garderobe hole at the base of the wall of Lydford Castle. The four walls of this Norman ruin were open to the stars; the ivy pushing its roots into the yellow mortar between the hewn granite blocks and inner rubble shook with the exploring winds. The crumbling hollow square stood upon a motte, or raised mound of earth. For centuries it had been used as a stannary prison, but now its dungeon was fallen in; brambles grew where men had lain in chains. Owls and jackdaws cried around the walls by night and day.

In the north-eastern wall of the keep was a mural chamber, built for hiding in an age of violence; it was dilapidated, the home of grasses and nettles. Stalks and blades were broken and bent; some blades were raising themselves, for the man who had been hiding in the wall all that

Sunday, shivering and sometimes groaning, had just climbed along the ledge and jumped down. He was peering through the garderobe hole.

Once he had had a name; he still bore the name, but it was never spoken on any lips except his own. To have heard other men speaking the names bestowed upon him with pride and tenderness at his christening would have been to him warning of a calamity more terrible to anticipate than death. For he was one of the most wretched of breathing things, a convict escaped from Princetown.

The number of his cell had been 76. He was known to the warders as Seventy-Six—the warders to whom it was forbidden to speak, unless he were asked a question. He was Seventy-Six, a corrupted animal that for years had quarried stone for other men's buildings, dug turf for other men's fires, sewn bags for other men's letters; had his hair cropped, his chin shaved, worn khaki clothes marked with the possessive broad-arrow of His Majesty's Government. An animal, not wild and pure, but with rot in its mind, that had done with life, but with which life had not yet done. He was godless.

The castle ruin was remembered from a happy visit from Plymouth, just before the Great War, when he had been on his honeymoon. From August 1914—when he had jacked up his job and stood for hours before a recruiting office, hoping with his pals to be sent off to fight before the fun was ended—until his escape the day

before, he had had practically no sense of time. He had exchanged one number of military servitude for another of penal servitude with only one period of tentative freedom—when he had murdered a man and a woman. Now he had another interval of freedom. The day before, Seventy-Six, who was serving a commuted death sentence, had dropped, from the scaffolding where he had been working, a block of stone on a warder's head, and escaped by running through the fog. He had scooped in his hands the icy waters of the moor, drinking on his knees. He had eaten grass. Repeatedly he had touched the hem of his jacket, fearful lest he might have lost his only companion.

Seventy-Six crept through the hole and listened. A row of larches grew between the castle and the church. The fog was gone, and moisture dripped from the branches. Organ music came with a dim light through the windows of the holy building. People were singing the evening psalms. Seventy-Six sneered mentally.

After listening he slunk down the slope of the motte to the larches, jumped softly down a bank, and walked to a gate. Once again he listened, but hearing no footfalls he climbed the gate and crossed the road. He entered the Rectory garden, startling from a laurel bush a bird that flew away with shrill squealing cries of alarm. Seventy-Six cursed and touched his jacket again. Reassured by the contact of his index finger-tip with the head

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of what he sought, he crept towards the house, stooping, with silent steps on the grass border of the main path.

A cautious inspection of the lightless building told him that all the lower windows were secured. He felt along one pane, wondering if he dare risk the noise of putting his elbow through it. While he was hesitating, he heard above the thudding of his heart the voices of men in the village street. He hurried away, going down a steep slope among spruce and larch trees where it was very dark, but safe. The river roared below in the gorge. He turned to the left, and walked on, often blundering into ants'-nests as tall as himself, and mossy-wet trunks of trees. He bruised his head, and a sudden mood of happiness came upon him.

The wood thinned by a viaduct with arches that spanned the gorge. A thought came to him that it would be easy to climb the embankment and lay his head on the rail, and end it all. But while he waited a train thundered above him. Sparks rained into the dark gorge. He was still free; but so hungry. Seventy-Six choked back a desire to cry, and walked on. The path was rough with shillets, and led down to a cottage before which were scattered bits of paper and empty tins. Washed underwear, some of it ragged, was thrown on the hedge in front. He scrounged two shirts, and a pair of trousers hanging with the lining inside-out. He chucked one shirt back

on the hedge, thinking that the bloke as owned it was a poor man.

An abandoned water-mill stood near the foot-bridge, with broken roof and walls, and he was about to explore when he heard a man's voice above the rushing sounds of the river. Thinking that the owner of the clothes had discovered the loss, Seventy-Six crossed by the foot-bridge. He had stepped down to the path on the other side when he saw the glow of a cigarette in the darkness above him. Someone was coming down the path through the wood. He crouched on the earth, hiding his face, and felt about for a stone or stick. The voice spoke again, high and eager, and of the quality that Seventy-Six had often laughed at when coming from the lips of music-hall comedians before the war. The red point came near, and now a girl was speaking. Seventy-Six listened to the first feminine voice he had heard since his trial at the Old Bailey.

"What fun, I say! But Denis, you mustn't ever let Daddy know we did it."

"Rather not! I feel rather an outsider to have done it, really, without his knowing. Of course he doesn't hunt, but after all I'm his guest. He's on the Committee too."

They stopped by the bridge.

"Shall we do it, Bid? Or shall we go up to the village and make a present of it to old Atters? Its dashed heavy to carry."

"Oh, lets do it! Daddy will laugh when he

hears," persuaded the girl. "He doesn't like Captain Russell for killing all the badgers, but he didn't like to say anything, as the farmer wanted them killed."

"The farmer was probably thinking of the free drinks next month, at the Badger Club supper" said the man, scornfully. "And he probably believes they do harm, as Russell says they do, the fat liar! The other day I heard him telling someone in the West Country Club that he had 'dug out a hundred and thirty pounds of badger flesh from one holt!' His very words. Whereas two labourers did the digging, three terriers got bitten, one a broken jaw, and all the work he did was to sometimes kneel at the hole, thrusting down an ear like a fungus to hear what was happening, and then to tootle-too on a copper horn with what little beery breath he possessed after his athletic feat of kneeling. Pah! And, of course, he stabbed the poor brocks when someone had banged them on the nose with a shovel."

"Pah!" said the young girl delightedly. "He calls that *sport!*" The man's eager voice spoke as they were moving away. "You know, Bid, it will be a great scene when hounds leave the hare's line and crash off down to the marsh! And when Russell and the rest of them arrive at the old holt—and find hounds at dinner!"

The conversation was meaningless for Seventy-Six, except for the word dinner. He allowed them to get a safe distance ahead of him before follow-

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ing along a footpath under trees beside the river. He climbed a wooden fence, dropped down to a single plank over a ditch, and followed away from the river and up a path which lay on the rock, past a waterfall that thundered white in the darkness, and on to grass again.

Half-an-hour later, he was trying to find what they had been hiding on the side of a hillock above the marshy ground by the river. The word dinner had so filled his mind while he had been staring in the direction of the voices, that he was convinced they had been hiding food. Reasons for the concealment of food did not occur to him. He stooped among the furze and bracken, to get the dinner that was waiting for him if only he could find the right place. His forehead knocked a thorny branch, and he was rubbing the pain away when he fell into a hole, where immediately he smelled a strong smell. Wondering if it led to a cave where he might hide by day, he felt with his hands. Chopped roots stuck out of its sides and roof. It led about six feet into the gravelly earth. At its end the tunnel narrowed, and was blocked by something soft. He pulled out a heavy bundle and unwrapped the cloth around it, to feel a cold smooth object, with a rough covering. It was a pie.

Seventy-Six pushed his thumb through the crust, and tasted. He tore off the pastry, and pulled out a handful of meat. He crammed it into his mouth, swallowing without chewing,

gulping with dry wheezings in his throat. He muttered and thought phrases like, "Gorblime, mate, you're in luck," and "Stuff to give'm!" The food gave him sharp pains, and he went to the river to drink. When he returned, he ate less quickly. It was a steak-and-kidney pie, flavoured with onions and hard-boiled eggs. The gravy was rich, tasty with salt and pepper. The dish was big, holding enough for a dozen men.

When he had eaten his fill, he again felt about the place. It ended in a tunnel too small for him to crawl into. He found a pair of light walking boots, with rubber pads fixed on the soles. With them were the skin of an animal, stuffed with straw, a coat, and a bowler hat. The smell he had noticed when he found the hole was thick on the skin. It dimly recalled the pain of caned hands in boyhood.

Some hours later, wandering on the lower heather slope of the moor, he found a hiding place under an oblong slab of granite. It was sealed on all sides save one, by which he entered. Low growing furze and heather and whortleberry formed a springy door. He crawled out again, and tore, with difficulty, handfuls of heather from the sodden ground, while a herd of small wild grazing cattle stared and sniffed near him. A wan white moon gleamed above low clouds moving over from the south-west. Seventy-Six made his bed, and placed in a far corner the dish with its life-making food. He wore the khaki, arrow-

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marked clothes no longer. At first he had hidden them in the pillaged badger-holt, but cunning had made him pull out the bundle, and, going back the way he had come, drop it, boots and all, in a waterfall of the gorge under the viaduct. But before discarding his prison clothes, he had withdrawn something from the jacket and placed it in the hem of the new coat.

To Seventy-Six, warm and happy, came the old thoughts he had had just before his marriage, when one Sunday night he had listened idly, his girl on his arm, to a street preacher, and believed what he had heard. He recalled another preacher, before whom the batallion had been marched, and formed into a hollow square, and ordered to lie down, while the chaplain stood up and preached. The old sweats 'ad said afterwards that they were for it again, because the padre 'ad talked about Gawd being on their side, which 'e always did just before a show.

The words were realised now by Seventy-Six for the first time since that September church parade before Loos in 1915. Gawd saved sinners! Gawd had arranged for the pie to be hid there! He sat on the granite slab, and said "Gorblime!" which was the vocal accompaniment of his poor darkened spirit's aspiration. He did not really pray to be blinded.

A rising wind stirred the heather, and curlew cries were blown across the sky. Seventy-Six thought, Gawd, please go hon 'elping me. Then

he drew out from the hem of his coat the thing he cared for more than anything on the earth, and played with it. It had been with him through his trial. He tossed it a few inches into the air, and caught it lightly between finger and thumb. He had played like this in his cell for hours, often watched by warders. It had shared his hopes for a better life—for Seventy-Six was still young enough to hope for a happier future. So acquainted was he with the ways of his companion that Seventy-Six could jerk it up and catch it again in the dark. He caught it by his front teeth, and biting on to its head, nicked it with a forefinger. It made the least musical note, which was as a loved voice comforting him. It fell, and he trembled; his throat was dry until he found it. How glad he was when it pricked his finger, and he picked it up and put it in its place. It was an ordinary pin, made of brass, the bright plating of which had long since worn off.

Seventy-Six crawled into the refuge and fell into a deep sleep before he had tucked in his legs. All night the rain was driven slantingly upon his boots. An old dog-fox trotted down to where he lay, made curious by the strange scent carried upwind to Links Tor where it had been seeking beetles. Three stoats visited the boots during the night; and when the rain ceased at daylight a pair of ravens, flying to the moor from their rocky fastness in the gorge, dipped from a height of two hundred yards to inspect the yellow things

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in the heather. After much flapping of wings and dipping of beaks over the granite slab, one dared to alight. With sidling walk and glances of little eyes, and uneasy hops into the air, it made a swift lunge with its beak, ripping a toe-cap. A grunt came from under the stone, and the ravens departed, fearing a trap. They were puzzled as the fox and the stoats had been at the unfamiliar taint in the air.

II

A few hours later the Inclefell Harriers met at the Dartmoor Inn. A small field was present, about two dozen in the saddle, including farmers. Miss Mollie Inclefell stood talking to Jim Huggins the huntsman. She was a slight fair girl, wearing black coat and breeches for riding astride. Six motor-cars had brought people. The Squire was there, on foot with his sons and daughters. With them was a young man who hid a nervous restlessness under an assumed lack of interest in the meet.

When the huntsman took the hounds to a certain brake of bracken, where a hare was usually to be found, the youngest daughter of the Squire set off with her companion, at a tangent from the curve made by the mounted and foot followers. When over the brow of the slope they started to run. Unseen, they crossed the river Lyd by

leaping on boulders. Quickly they climbed up the other slope. The two friends were making for high ground whence the old badger holt might be seen. For a quarter of a mile they climbed in sunlight, and then they sat down on an oblong block of granite embedded in heather.

They had been sitting down less than a minute when hounds far away and below gave tongue. A hare had been started from its form. The high voice of Jim Huggins sang faintly in the wind. They watched the hare making a right-handed turn towards the field of flat-poll cabbages behind the Dartmoor Inn. The hare sped away from the leading hounds. They watched it crossing the place where, the previous afternoon, the young man had taken off his brogues and pulled from a haversack a pair of yellow boots . . . these hounds checked, they clamoured, they pushed their muzzles together so that they looked like a great fungus suddenly grown on the moor, only to break up into fragments that streamed along a new line. They over-ran the place where the hare had branched, and raced along the crest of the hill above the stream. The extended field cantered behind.

When the young man turned to say something to the girl standing a few yards away, he was startled by her white cheeks. She was staring at something near. Following her gaze, he saw the pair of boots which he had imagined to be with the other things in the badger holt. The boots

were covering the sockless feet of a hidden man.

The girl whispered, "Denis, it may be the escaped convict!"

Denis stared at the boots again, and said, "Oh, good heavens." Then he leapt through the heather and clutched one of the heels. His hand was kicked away.

"Come out, I say," he said quickly. "There isn't a moment to be lost."

"Oo are yer?" snarled a voice.

"On my honour I wont hurt you," begged Denis, who was certain that the man was the escaped convict. "You are wearing the boots I hid in the badger holt. It was meant for a joke. I really should advise you to clear off as soon as possible."

He was deeply alarmed, and had tried to talk in an ordinary voice to reassure his companion. She was a nervous and imaginative girl, but recently recovered from scarlet fever.

"Why can't a bloke 'ave a bit of a kip if 'e wants to?" threatened the voice. And then, "If yer tries any monkey tricks, I'll bash yer, straight I will!"

"Denis, please come away, please," implored the trembling girl.

The baying of the pack grew fainter as hounds sank the hill to the holt two miles away. After more persuasion, the man came out, clutching a piece of granite in his left hand. He wore a pair of labourer's trousers with the lining on the

outside, a grey shirt, and a grey bowler hat. The wan blue eyes of his ruined face looked at Denis with such an ailing wildness in them that the young man moved nearer to the girl.

"Don't be alarmed, I say," he said, aghast and smiling. "Look here, you ought really to clear off as quickly as possible. In about ten minutes or less hounds may be running your line. I laid a drag yesterday with those boots you've got on now. Wherever you've been walking they may follow. Now if you'll only run to Links Tor over there on the skyline, you'll find a narrow crack in the granite, up which you can climb to the top. It's hard to get up the Chimney, but once there you'll be safe until they can whip hounds off. Look here, I'll follow you and give you a pound for the trouble you've had through my damned foolishness. And I'll give you my word I won't breathe a word to anyone that I've seen you. After all, I haven't the least idea who you are, and it's none of my business—I mean, not my affair who you are. Now go, as quick as you can."

Seventy Six, having been born and bred in a Bermondsey slum, had never seen a live hound in his life. He looked at the summit of Links Tor.

"Climb up on the skyline to be sniped at, eh? Not a hope. See any green in my eye?"

Denis said earnestly, "Well, look here, change boots. I've got you in this mess, and I can run. But . . . all right Bid, don't worry. But it wouldn't be any good, unless you hide your coat.

Clear off, there's a good fellow. Oh, my God, do hurry, look, they're running to the badger holt."

The girl never forgot the look in the convict's eyes. She was unable to cry, she was fixed as though in a nightmare. The face became set in her mind, as a symbol, not of human spoliation and despair, but of cruelty and evil. She knew nothing of war. She heard him mutter something as he flung the granite lump at Denis' face, who groaned and dropped into the heather. She could not breathe. She heard hounds in the distance, and thought, Come soon, come soon. She watched the blood beginning to run from the purple mark on Denis' forehead. She was dizzy and sick, and vaguely realized that the man was ramming her father's old otter-hunting hat on his head as he ran. The hillside seemed to slide up the sky.

Long before he reached the tor, Seventy-Six had to use his hands to aid him. After splashing and slipping through soggy ground he came to a clitter of rocks overgrown with turf and mosses. A holly had its roots in a granite crevice, a tree twisted and hoary with lichen and without a red berry among its spineless leaves. The holly grew near a mountain ash. Both had been planted by birds.

Looking down, while holding a branch of holly, Seventy-Six could see the toff kneeling by the girl, and below them, the river at the base of the hill. He neither saw nor heard hounds, for they were running down the unseen slope which

led from the marshy ground. Beyond the marsh, on the opposite hillock, was the badger holt.

He climbed the clitter, and went at a steady pace onwards. Here was dryer ground that dipped gradually to a saucer-like depression rising to Links Tor about a mile away against the sky. Being under the everlasting wind the heather was knee-deep and springy. There were no rocks to hinder. The flag pole on Hare Tor to the south—erected to give the signal when gunners were firing on the artillery ranges—lost its dark outline in a drift of cloud as he began to ascend again.

Seventy-Six began to hear the wind as he climbed towards Links Tor. From a sighing in the stalks of heather it swelled to a chilly whistling, and his clothes were blown against his form. About fifty yards from the summit, where was lodged a squat roundish mass of black granite grooved and scalloped and smoothed by wind and rain of a thousand centuries, he sat down and rested. Turning in a northerly direction he saw a great brown and grey ball of a hill, at whose base ran the leaden vein of the Lyd. He looked across the Great Nodden to fields in sunlight and shadow, and away to a blue infinity of land and sky. The south was dim and grey. Rain. Seventy-Six was glad, for it would hide him. He thought that he would strike inland to the moor behind him and hide till dusk, when he would return and make for the sea. As he became hopeful again he

felt sorry that he had slung the brick at that young toff. It had been done in fear.

A sudden deep croaking over his shoulder made him turn his head. He was in time to see black cartwheeling wings as a bird swerved and dropped out of sight behind the tor again. The raven had meant to alight there, but something had disturbed it. As Seventy-Six stared he saw a thin object, like a stick, thrust up from the centre of the granite. It thickened towards its end, and then it disappeared. In its place was an arm, followed by a head and shoulders. The man levered himself upon the platform, picked up his rifle, and staggered to his feet, his legs crooked as he braced himself against the icy blast of the wind.

Seventy-Six tried to force his head back to its normal position, but it was held there as though by a spring fixed to his spine. He continued to stare at the crooked figure on Links Tor. He had to stiffen the muscles of throat and neck before he could force his head away. He sat rigidly, wondering when he would be shot in the back. He waited, until the feeling in his spine compelled him to twist his head again. The warder had dropped on one knee, and was covering the convict with his rifle.

Seventy-Six pretended not to have seen him. The curiosity of dread made him turn round once more, just as a shout enfeebled by wind came from the warder. He was beckoning Seventy-Six, standing as upright as the wind would permit,

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and holding the rifle in his right hand at the position of trail. Seventy-Six got on his feet, and while he was walking towards the tor the warder pulled a whistle from his breast pocket and blew a long blast. As though in answer a ragged edge of mist trailed in cold silence past the convict, and washed around the monolith of granite. Links Tor faded out, but the whistle continued its double note—*fran-n-n-n-n-n* in the fog.

Seventy-Six stood irresolute. He felt for the head of the pin. The touch of its head was like a double dose of rum before going over the bags. He laughed, and was turning it in finger and thumb when a hound spoke below. It was the leader, a dog named Lamplighter. The pack was less than a mile away, running the line of the yellow boots, whose scent was pungent in the mist. Again Seventy-Six thought of being caned on his hands, before the boys and girls of the fifth standard of the Council School. He remembered the bag of aniseed balls, which he had been made to throw in the master's waste-paper basket—his mother's birthday gift, bought with two of her scanty spare pennies. And afterwards the master had made him face the class, and had used the little boy's tearful gulping for a crudely sarcastic lecture on the subject of Heroism. He had not known that a son felt that his mother's heart was thrown in the basket.

Seventy-Six thought, This fog is a bit of all

right! Stuff to give the troops! He set off at a run, on his toes. He had been the champion runner of the right-wing company of the battalion. The moor was a chaos of whitey-grey, cold and dim. Soon his eyelashes were damp. The ground was firm, and he leapt over the ling. The rubber pads gave a good grip. After a quarter of an hour his breath came quickly, and he felt a relief when the ground began to slope down. The noise of water was before him. Lower and lower he descended until he came to the Rattle Brook fretting its stony bed. He crossed without wetting his feet, and listened. In front of him the ground rose again, and a remote baying seemed to float down through the mist. He pushed on up the hill, but was forced to rest at the top. He imagined that as he was invisible, he was safe, because he did not know that hounds followed by nose alone. As he lay on a couch of ling he heard them giving tongue, not an echo this time. They had reached the unseen crest of the coombe. He jumped up and hastened onwards, cursing them because he thought they would betray him to the warders. The clamour suddenly increased—where Seventy-Six had rested—and he ran on again.

His next rest was half-an-hour later, when he flung himself by the thread of a stream which had cut for itself a channel in the peaty soil. He dipped his hat in the brown water, flinging it over his face, and washing out his mouth. In the old

running days, when the Guards Division had been out of the line, he had been trained never to drink during a long-distance run. He lay on his back, wishing he had a pal with him; one minute, two minutes, three minutes, and then the baying of hounds.

Patches of ling and grass tufts became scantier. Everywhere was water. The rubber soles of his boots often slid. He ran flat-footed, over a maze of water-threads. An idea came to him that he must jump them all, that he would have bad luck if he slipped into one. To ease himself he carried the hat in his left hand. It began to impede him, but he dared not throw it away, as he would need it until his hair grew. It hindered more when carried under an arm, so he rammed it on his head again. During the next half-hour, toiling up a long hill, he changed its position more than fifty times.

Eventually the hat was thrown away beside a layer of turves that had been cut and laid in wide arrow-shaped lines to drain and dry, where it was found long afterwards. Disturbed in their feeding, three golden plover rose in the mist before the runner with swift anchor-winged flight, and with gentle cries of alarm. Snipe, thrusting long bills into the soft ground, were driven up from their feeding. Sometimes a raven croaked over his head.

He was so fatigued when he reached the Great Kneeset that he had to walk. His feet, with

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blistered toes and heels, felt as hot and heavy as they had felt when he had had trench-feet, swelled and red as tomatoes. He flung away the stolen shirt, soggy with sweat, on the morass where the river Tavy rises. His trousers to the knees were wet and black with peat. He had blundered into many shallow bogs. The deep sucking quakers, which shook and rippled at his passing, were bright green, and easily seen.

He staggered across the splash in the peaty hollow of an old tarn, hid by swirls of fog. A broken spade was stuck into a heap of turves in the hollow, and in the turves was an iron box holding a metal stamp, a bottle of violet ink, and a book wherein many names were signed. Its fly-leaf was ringed and smudged by intersecting violet circles holding the letters CRANMERE. Seventy-Six remembered. Past and present were mingled as reality in his contused brain. In the early summer of 1914 a London-born youth and his wife, on their honeymoon, had scrawled their names across a page, with the remark, "It's all rite"; and now, nearly ten years later, the mortal remains of the woman mouldered in a South London graveyard, and neither age nor name mattered further for the husband. Seventy-Six, grey-haired, was resting the weight of his head and shoulders on forehead and knees; but a younger man, in khaki, was writing a letter to a wife still living:—Dear Dol, i write hoping you are quite all rite, as it leaves me at present, in

the pink. Are you gettin the speration allowence all rite. i hopes so. We are not alowed to say where we are but it isn't so bad, althogh a bit of mud about. I hope to get Blighty leaf soon it is my turn soon and i hops the Sarjint Major don't forgit. No more now from your lovin husband Bob.

P.S. This war is a B——.

He blacked out the last word, remembering that his officer would read the letter.

And swak on the envelope flap—Sealed With A Kiss. The pencil-stump, paper, and sand-bagged traverse, sun shining, plank he sat on, all dropped into darkness. He heard the whining of ricochets, saw the greenish flares quivering in the water-filled shell-holes, as the relieved right-wing company filed down the wooden track to the Menin Road. Jerry's machine guns were clacking from many points. Going out at last! Rest billets reached, and rum-in-tea dished out. The S.M. was calling out names for Blighty leaf. Christ, 'ow is 'eart thumped! Is own number, 'is name! He saw again the lorry in which he had hopped to railhead, after fourteen months in the mud of Artois and the shallow watery trenches of the Salient. During the slow journey in the train, clanking and stopping and jerking on again past sandhills and pines to Boulogne, the young Coalie was singing and shouting, happy at the thought of seeing again the wife he had constantly thought of, but infre-

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quently written to, during so many evenings in smoky estaminets, candle-dim billets, and lousy cubbie-holes. A stay of two days in the rest camp owing to submarines in the Channel, and again he was singing with his chums as they marched down to the quay. Horse-nosed officer bloke with A.M.L.O. on his brassard, at the gangway with red-cap sergeant and two policemen scrutinising the yellow pass. Then the pitch and roll of the boat, the nausea and prostration, the grey cliffs of England, the pulling-himself-together and the tottering off at Folkestone, the train with the black-painted lamps and drawn blinds, the faces in smoke and the crush of equipment, the glide into Victoria Station so vast and dark and subdued, yet noisy with feet and engine steam. Outside the women he didn't want to talk to saying "Hullo dearie," and then—the first drink of good old English beer, a pint of mild-and-bitter, . . . How strange civvy suits looked!

One reality faded; nausea remained. Seventy-Six lifted his head and harkened to hounds following him in the mist. Two hours before they had streamed over the ragged grass below Links Tor. They were unfatigued, but had veered off the line, following the aniseed straying in the mist. Seventy-Six thought that the warders would see his name in the book, and know that he had been past Cranmere. He carried the book away with him, and trod it into a bog, where it was never found . . . afterwards it was indignantly

stated that someone had taken it because it contained the autograph of the Prince of Wales.

Seventy-Six loped on for another half-hour, descending to a coombe where the mist was thinner. He fell over a rock beside a stream, and choked as he tried to suck up the water which turned his teeth to icicles. When he tried to rise again he had to draw his feet from off the rock; he felt as though he were dragging the rock with them. He prayed with broken shouts, as he had prayed under the barrage at Festubert. His ribs were hugging him to death, the prison shirt was smothering him. He tore it off and left it on the rock, and pulled himself onwards, as a child in a nightmare. Now he was clad only in trousers and boots, and the Union Jack tattooed on his back. The flag was one of the patriotic relics of 1914, done in an Aldershot shop after cheers and beers with pals, following flaring mental hatred of the sergeant-instructor drilling the squad to breaking point on the parade-ground.

Over rocks and rushy tufts, while thirty four hounds followed less than three hundred yards behind. His line of running had been in a loop, and he was approaching the Rattle Brook again, where it merged into the yellow winter waters of the Tavy. He plunged into the river foaming and swirling among black and pink-blotched boulders and rocky tables which for centuries the floods had slowly carved. It sucked him under, and spun him in its twist. A spur of rock

held him by the trousers, until they ripped, and wrapped round his legs. Hauling himself out, Seventy-Six waded back into the river again when the leading hounds viewed him and gave tongue.

He was carried a hundred yards down the water in less than a minute, to where a tree-grown islet divided the current. All the air was knocked from his chest. On hands and knees he crawled to the right bank. The strings of his thigh and calf muscles were drawn tight, and each lung was bayoneted. A spike of rock had torn his back, and the Union Jack was fouled by the blood of the ruined patriot.

A mist strayed through Tavy Cleave, and the broken screes towering hundreds of feet above were revealed and hidden by clouds. An old hill-fox deep in a clitter sniffed as he passed below and listened contentedly to the hounds which had crossed the river. The raven that had followed Seventy-Six for nearly three hours croaked a treble croak to its mate from a scaur of rock four hundred feet above the toiling figure.

It was now between half-past two and three o'clock in the afternoon. Feeling for the pin, Seventy-Six realized that he had thrown it away with the clothes.

Ever since he had been blown by a high-explosive shell out of a communication trench in the Hohenzollern Redoubt, with burst sandbags and pieces of a shattered Coalie, his chum, a spectre had fretted his life. Always—and espe-

cially in drink—since his fourteen days in the hospital at Hazebrouck “recovering” from the shock of the bright shell-blast, he had been liable to moods both morose and violent. At Hazebrouck an inspecting Surgeon-General, a regular officer with two rows of ribbons and honours, suspected him of malingering, and ordered him immediately to be sent back to duty in the line.

The thought of his wife had kept the spectre away; and afterwards, the companionship of the pin in his cell had been a barrier against the dark fears which came into his disrupted mind. When he knew that the pin was lost, Seventy-Six threw up his arms and wailed. He saw what other men would not have seen, had they been with him. The new consciousness was accompanied by a sense of ease and lightness. All pain and fatigue left him. He seemed to be floating along, with the least touch of his toes on rocks and water.

The body of Seventy-Six was walking in the shallow bed of the leat which, serpentining through the moor, eventually serves the arsenic mines of Mary Tavy; but a Coldstream Guardsman also was walking on the platform of the Tube Railway at the Elephant and Castle Station. The platform was thick with the smell of many women and children sitting and lying against the wall. He was relieved that the journey was finished, and hitching-up rifle on right shoulder he shoved a way into the lift. Outside the dear old boozier, where he had first met his wife. Now there was

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a war on, and a bloke couldn't get a pint after nine o'clock. The street was dark. A tramcar passed him, bumping and clattering, all its lights blacked over, except for the least glimmers. He lit a cigarette, and the voice of a special constable riding past on a lampless bicycle cried out in agitated sternness, *Put that light out! Second warning's been given!* He answered with a laugh, *Don't get the —— wind up, mate!* As he strode along the Old Kent Road, gunfire broke out, and a hundred white beams swept the sky. The yelling civvies might cut and run, but not a Coalie! He whistled as he walked. *Z-z-z-zim-zz-zz-zop* fell the splinters of anti-aircraft shells. *Wh-oo-sh! Crack!* that was a nosecap that had split the paving stone just behind him. He walked on to his street, erect and with cap-peak pulled low over his eyes. Near his house he stopped, and looked upwards. A groaning had opened in the sky above him. It filled the street, it increased and snored through the darkness. *Whoo-ursh, whoooursh*, an immense slow corkscrewing of sound, that grew as though the earth were falling out of its orbit. The soldier crouched under a window ledge, while a starving cat miaowed to him, and rubbed itself against his cheek. Poor moggy, he 'adn't no milk to give. He stroked the cat, whose purring was drowned in the tremendous rushing noise descending. It was like a thousand minnies coming down. (The minnenwerfers in the Salient had made a lesser noise.)

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He waited, and sweated, for it was coming straight at him. He pressed himself against the wall, against the bricks made greasy by children's hands, holding the cat protected in his arms, his eyes closed, his breath stopped. A red glare showed through the lids, and immediately a stunning detonation flung him with the cat into the gutter. Houses swayed and tumbled, and roared down in clouds of bricks and dust. He ran up the street, for the Zeppelin torpedo had fallen just about where he lived. The bomb had flattened sixteen houses, but his house was safe, except for a splintered door. Won't Old Dol be surprised to see me, he thought. He pushed the door down, crashing in upon the landlady, an old widow woman who was wearing a crimson flannel nightgown. Her bluish-white face was beyond speech. She moaned something, and pointed at a broken methyated spirit bottle on the floor. *Where's Dol?* he asked, *Upstairs?* She stood and moaned in the crude fumes of her own breath. *You're boozed, Ma!* he said. She let out a shriek when he pointed upstairs. *I to'd her not to do it. I to'd'er not to!* she moaned. Her candle wobbled, and fell. He ran up the stairs, pulling himself up with his hands, and stones out of the wall fell away with his clutch. (Seventy-Six had reached the ruin of Redford Farm.) He turned the handle of the bed-sitting room. The door was locked. A man's voice said, *What the 'ell.* With the butt of his rifle he broke in the panels, and burst

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the lock. A gas-jet burned with a small blue flame. The soldier turned the tap, and it fluttered like a yellow bat. He snarled, and drew his bayonet out of the scabbard, and fixed it. The man whined, *'Ere, I say, maite, what's the gaine?* Then he shrieked, and hid his face under the bed-clothes, with the soldier's wife. The soldier stabbed them under the patched counterpane. He saw the spirit of his wife fly up on white wings. But the bloke she had picked-up wouldn't die. After each lunge of the bayonet he came alive again with more and more faces, which tried to bite him with their fangs. The soldier thrust and pointed and parried, groin—belly—right nipple—left nipple—throat—just as the sergeant-instructor had yelled at him during bayonet practice on the stuffed sacks at Aldershot. He smashed with the butt-stroke at their jaws and eyes, but the faces pulled him down. He did not care, they did not hurt him, and with a laugh he walked away from them, into darkness.

III

Redford Farm, near the leat which leads to the arsenic mines, had been a ruin many years before the last run of the Inclefell Harriers. One chimney-stack was still standing at the eastern end of the farmhouse on the Saturday before, for on

THE OLD STAG

that day, wandering over the moor, I drove out a white owl that was dozing away the daylight up the flue, among the firemarked stones. But on the Monday, when Miss Mollie Inclefell, lost in the mist for some hours, and leading her mare lame in the near fore, arrived at Redford Farm about three o'clock, it had collapsed, as though someone had tried to climb up it. A raven flew over the heap of stones and damp mortar-dust lying on the ground. Several red-muzzled hounds came to her and leapt up affectionately. They remained by her, two of them licking her face, while she lay pale and still in a fainting fit caused by the sight of two shinbones sticking out of a pair of yellow boots.

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His shadow came round the corner first, for the sun was not high in the southern February sky. When he saw the hounds on the green before the Feathers Inn, a grin cracked his dirty face, his eyes shone, and he gave a whoop of joy. Turning round he swung a sleeve of an officer's discarded khaki service tunic, which his skinny arm animated, and shrieked.

"Crikey, whata lotta dawgs! Corlumme! 'Ere, quick, boys!"

A man in a brown tweed golfing suit, wearing Service tie and black naval shoes without toe-caps, watched the urchin as he padded across the muddy road, and said almost to himself:

"How beautiful."

The girl in the broken-rainbow-coloured jersey beside him said slowly, without moving her head:

"What's beautiful?"

"That boy."

She laughed in her throat, softly, so that I just heard the derision, and her murmured drawl of:

"That dirty little urchin beautiful. Why?"

"The impulse to share a delight. So human," replied the man in a low voice.

He clenched the three fingers of his left hand hanging by his side. A pink weal was where the

second knuckle should have been. He did not look at her. She was about nineteen, and he was perhaps thirty years of age. There were grey hairs in the dark hair of his head. She wore a brown felt hat, and her gold hair was plaited in coils hiding the ears. Standing behind her was a tall, loose-jointed man, in grey flannel trousers and threadbare coat of tweed. A stranger. He was watching the girl stealthily. He saw the curves of cheek and chin, and hoped she would turn her head and show her face. A brooch was fastened to the left side of her hat, made of a hare's pad mounted on a silver pin. It was a meet of the jelly-dogs, as beagles are sometimes called, to hunt a hare known to be couched in a near corn-field.

The man who had spoken about the urchin did not speak again. The friends of the urchin came round the corner at the double, three of them, and stood on the grass near the tiny hounds. There were twelve couples, some of them standing on hind legs with paws on the skirts of girls fondling long thin ears, stroking short and tapering muzzles or patting shoulders that sloped and ribs round and deep. Some sat shivering in the grass, gazing with soft, full eyes at the kennel-huntsmen. Warily the urchin advanced, and put out a grimy paw to pat one of them. Columbine looked at him, and he snatched back his hand.

"I saie, mister," he piped in his Cockney voice to a youth who stood near.

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"What do you want?" asked the honorary whip, on his just-left-school dignity before the assembling field, and knowing that small boys in the country near London were sometimes cocky and impertinent. Many people were looking amusedly at the child in the enveloping tunic, torn knickers, and bare bony shanks thrust into dirty-white cricketing boots, too large for him.

"Willy bate?"

"What?" said the youth, flushing.

"I said, willy bate?" replied the urchin, with mock politeness, "Will your dorg bate if aye stroke him? Will your d'horg mind if aye give him a pat?" And as this made his tongue tired he ceased to mimic, and said, "No, straight, guv'nor, willy snap me arm off if I tries to get pally like wiv 'im?"

"Here, you be off!" ordered the huntsman, to the relief of the young whip, who was so neatly uniformed in green cap and coat, white stock and breeches, and pipe-clayed canvas boots with rubber soles. His whalebone whip was held in yellow-gloved hand.

Huntsman put horn to lips and blew a blast. Immediately the tiny hounds clustered round him, yapping their delight, jumping up at him as they lashed eagerly their gay sterns. He moved off at a quick pace, with the excited jelly-dogs at his rubbered heels. Then came the two honorary whips, one on each side of the black, tan, and white pack. The natty youth was flushed no

more. His colleague was a young man with a red and jolly countenance, who worked in a stock-jobber's office five days a week and whipped-in every Saturday to the pack. He was a younger son of a Surrey squire whose estate had been sold to a syndicate of builders of small semi-detached villas and bungalows.

The third whip kept the rear of the pack. He was the second hunt servant, a lad of fifteen with an incipient moustache and beard, big feet, and raw hands. He walked stiltedly because his feet were swelled with chilblains; he had told nobody lest he might lose his job, which he loved. He had a shy smile, a soft voice and childish brown eyes; ladies often gave him sandwiches, which he ate in crammed mouthfuls.

Then came the Master, an elderly man who lived in a south-eastern suburb of London and was a chartered accountant by profession. He was popular because he managed to find time to speak to most of the field, and he remembered all their names. He was talking with an architect out with his smallest son, a boy who at that moment was stuffing a woollen muffler into his greatcoat pocket, for the morning had been cold and his mother had insisted on his taking it with him. Behind the master walked an underwriter's clerk at Lloyd's who had been a temporary major during the war; the three-guinea annual subscription (he thought) was a good investment (although the rules permitted but six Saturday

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mornings "off" a year) as it entitled him to membership of the Hunt, and therefore he felt himself to be a Somebody, especially after his photograph had appeared in the *Tatler*.

Then came three girls, in the early twenties, one of them fair and fat, another dark and serious, and the face of the third was carelessly powdered. They wore coloured jumpers, tweed skirts and soft felt hats, and the fat girl "rather liked the look of the man that Calmady girl had in tow." I gathered that the Calmady girl was the girl with the ear-plaits and that her "tow" was an officer retired from the Royal Navy who had been in the same ship as Miss Calmady's brother, who had been killed at Zeebrugge. Older ladies and gentlemen followed; the field numbered about fifty people. The daughters of the local doctor and lawyer were there, with walking sticks and brogue shoes worn at heel. Jolly girls, one holding a panting black cocker spaniel straining at leash. By them, but always changing place, progressed the urchins. All walked on the asphalt of the main road. Red motor omnibuses from London crept past, and cars and cycles. People peered at the jelly-dogs packed into the kerb by anxious whips, smiled, and passed on.

"Oh, *look* at those dear little dogs!"

"Aren't they too sweet?"

"Mummie, Mummie, what's those dogs for?"

"Hunting, sonny."

"What's that?"

"They fight foxes, and bite them up."

The 'bus passed on with the peering faces.

Near the tail of the field, as though they wanted to be apart from others, walked the girl with the ear-plaits and the sailor. She walked from her hips, levelly on rubber shoes bound to her feet by anklets of some brown cloth. The tall stranger followed. He imagined she could dance on her toes; she had the form and carriage of a dancer. Her tweed skirt was unfastened from the four leather buttons on her left flank, and as she swung along in her cool maiden grace he could see that she wore dark breeches and fawn-coloured stockings. The many-coloured jumper was cut low, showing where base of neck joined her back, and the flesh was white. He followed purposely to see her. There was a celandine open on the bank of the lane up which they had turned, the first he had seen that year, and the sight of the yellow star put joy into his heart. Planetary life might be chaotic and purposeless he thought, as some philosophers made it their life-work to prove, but the things of the earth were beautiful to themselves. The celandine turned to the sun, ardent to itself; the hare day-dreamed in the cornfield; the stranger's imagination was quickened by female loveliness. Always near her he walked, unnoticed and solitary, neither attractive nor unattractive, of the Celtic type so despised by the German thinkers. He was a writer of little stories about swallows and weeds, old

men, children, dogs, and other humble things.

Through a gate—"last through fasten that gate, please!"—into a field of loam, scattered with broken flints and thin green blades of corn. A lark sang sunwards. Eagerly hounds rushed over the corn, and almost at once the pack gave tongue as a hare sprang up from its form and ran away. Its long hind legs were thrust between its forepads and its ears were upright. The excited yapping increased as the hounds lost view behind a hedge, and they tore through the gap, scrambling on one another and yelping in an agony of frustration and excitement.

"Crikey, boys, come on!" yelled the urchin, running over the field with all the speed his too-large cricketing boots would give him. His friends followed. Several members of the field began to run towards a gate, not wishing to break a larger gap in the farmer's fence. It was not a good day for scent, as a cold wind blew from the north-west, and the beams of the sun had not yet melted the rime in the fields. On the other side of the hedge was a boggy meadow, and through this the hare ran, under a gate, and into another cornfield. There she waited, crouched on the ground, listening in terror to the beagles and the horn of the huntsman. Columbine was apparently a babbler, because many times the whips rated her. She spoke when there was no scent; immediately half the pack rushed after her, giving tongue, wagging their sterns and unable to con-

tain their eager excitement. When the line was found again they rushed away, each straining muscle and sinew to be leader, and with a spasmodic but sonorous burst of music that made the stranger's blood glow and his feet desire to run.

The hare crouched by the headland of the field until the pack, babbling and rushing everywhere, was fifty yards from her. Then she laid her long ears on her neck and sped away, looking back at them with her hazel eyes. Over the plough she went, the beagles driving her and yelling their loudest. Soon they had crossed a ditch into another meadow, leaving the runners far behind. Only the huntsman kept close to them, calling them by name, while the first whip rated the more blatant liars. The other whips went wide to the flanks, in order to watch which way the hare would run. The followers could hear the pack in full cry returning, for the hare had doubled back across the field and passed about a hundred yards in front of the laggard runners, or rather, walkers.

About half-an-hour later the line took them to a quarry, where a crane was swinging a bucket of earth into a truck standing on rails. The crane was a tall web of steel, painted scarlet. About a dozen men were digging crude Fuller's Earth on ledges, or steps, thirty feet below the field edge, which was guarded by a fence made of rotting railway sleepers and two sagging, rusty steel-wire cables, the higher about a yard from the ground. The writer of stories saw the gold-

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haired girl leap the fence and stand still about three inches from the edge, calmly looking down. The position apparently caused her companion some alarm, for he begged her to come back. She did not heed him. He saw the stranger approaching, and waited with anxious face until he had gone on, when again he asked her to be careful. He called her Betty.

"My dear Gerry, you are absurd," and again the derision in the laugh.

The horn sounded on the top of the slope, and again they ran on. The hare had been hiding in a hedge, watching with terror the approach of the pack, unable to forbear the suspense, perhaps, of not knowing definitely if they were owning her scent. She had been leaping sideways as she ran, in order to break the line. She ran over the lane and by an oak tree into another field. Hounds followed, but the scent was difficult owing to the heaps of midden dumped every few yards in straight lines, awaiting the two-pronged forks of the labourers who would scatter the top-dressing before ploughing it in. However, she was seen by the stockbroking whip, who yelled "*Yoi-yoi-yoi, Whirligig, Reveller, Snowdrop, yoi-yoi,*" and they rushed at full speed to him.

The hare ran for three more hours, roughly in a figure of eight, covering many miles. Other hares were put up, but huntsman and whips lifted the pack from the "cutting-in pussies" and laid them on the line of the original animal. She ran

noticeably slower, and scrambled through thick quick-set hedges that would baulk a fresh hare. The stranger was wet to his knees, having slipped at a take-off on the bank of a brook and fallen into the water. He was more fortunate than a fat butcher in flannel trousers and sports jacket, however, who, in attempting to leap a ditch, fell sprawling, to crawl out covered with black slime. Over this ditch the girl leapt with easy grace; she ran tirelessly, and often her companion was left half a mile behind. But the stranger followed. Barb-wire, the curse of the fox-hunter, was his friend that day, for it caught in her Fair Isle jersey and he was able to unhook her. Her shoulders were broad, and she had rolled her sleeves to the elbow, revealing lovely arms at which he stared. She thanked her helper : he dared to look straight into her eyes.

The intense blue of the spring gentian that grows where the snow has melted on the Pyrenees, the gleam of our English kingfisher over the brook, the night-heaven watched from among the midsummer meadow grasses, the sunlit sea calm over drowned chalk, were not bluer than the eyes which looked into his for a moment of time that civilised man alone reckons. She turned away and ran on. He followed, his heels blistered and his calves aching. He watched the muscles of her calves working under the fawn stockings at each pressing lift of her toes. More wire, a single strand this time, at the end of the field, a gap in

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the thorns. She bent and put her head under the strand, turning sideways to pass through. The skirt slipped away and under the stretched material of the breeches he saw the shape of the huntress' thigh. Again the stranger stopped and stared at the line of leg, ankle, knee, as the maiden body bent under the rusty wire. She gave a little cry, for a thorn had drawn a line on her neck. There was a drop of blood on the white skin. He grasped in his hand the spray of prickly-guarded buds and tore them away.

"Thank you," she said, and ran on, effortlessly as before, always leaning forward slightly, arms loose by her side. He followed, a stitch in left lung and shoes filled with gravel rasping the blisters on toes and heels. Pain was nothing to him. Two more miles he followed, sometimes (dreading lest he give offence) at a distance of a hundred yards.

II

He cared nothing for the hunting. Beagles were amusing little creatures to watch, but his sympathies were with the hare, one of the purest and most timid of animals. He had hunted the wild boar of the Black Forest, on foot with spear upheld to ward the slashing tusks; sought the spoor of the lion whose paw-stroke is instant death. He had hunted the English fox, which is mur-

derous to many birds and animals, and would be extinct, except in the wildest parts of England, were it not for the protection of foxhunters and its cunning when chased. To follow hounds was to be filled with the joy of living dangerously, even if bury-rotten banks and boggy Devon "bottoms" were not exactly dangerous. He hoped the hare would escape, but he feared she was doomed. Already she was stiffening with exhaustion and stopping every hundred yards. The beagles were in a fury of desire and excitement as they ran here, there, and everywhere to find the line of failing scent.

The chase took them near a railway embankment, when huntsman became fearful for his pack, the noise of a train coming from the distance. Hare doubled, however, and led them away. The field was by this time scattered. The line led them past another quarry, but deserted and partly flooded. A dead dog floated at the verge, near a sunken wicker basket and an old boat. There were allotments here, with dry stems of weeds among the yellow cabbage stalks. To shorten the distance between hounds and herself, the girl ran down into the quarry and climbed the loose rocklike lumps that were piled against a cutting. The stranger watched her leaping from stone to stone, until she reached the crest and disappeared. He scrambled up, grazing his ankle, and at the top he paused to get his breath. She ran on, seeming to rise from the hard clods

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with the lightness of thistle-seed bounding in the wind on its silver filaments. Yet she was no frail, gazelle-like maid; she was thewed and shouldered like a Viking's daughter. He loped on again, pleasing to force sinew and muscle. It was a pleasure to endure. He was not running for his life.

The hare had crawled under a wooden fence into a shrubbery of rhododendron and holly surrounding the gardens and paddock of a house. Half a mile away and below smoke rose from the chimney pots of Redhill. The fence was five feet high, and placing her right hand on the wood she sprang. Her legs were level with the top of the fence as she hurled herself over, but she must have landed with a crash on the other side, for when next he saw her (having climbed the fence) several sere holly leaves were hooked to skirt and jumper. She gave him a cool and casual look. He was breathing heavily through his mouth; she was entirely at ease, breathing through nostrils slightly expanded.

Hounds were speaking in the cover, and the huntsman called out:

"Stand up by the railings, sir, please. She may be close to the house. She won't leave here. Stop shouting, boy!"

His last words were addressed to the urchin who was yelling at three of the questing hounds. He grinned, and came to stand by the stranger. The girl stood ten yards away, with her back to

the house, one foot on the lowest rail of the fence. She glanced indifferently but repeatedly at the gate through which they had entered into the paddock. A man and a girl came through, and several others, to stand about in the grass while the pack drew cover and a colt cantered about the paddock, sometimes stopping to whinny its dismay. The urchin talked to the stranger, who regarded him with friendly eyes.

"Ave yer sin the rabbit, guv'nor? I 'ave. Cor, it wasn't 'alf a big 'un!"

"It coudden 'arf run, coudden it? Lumme, I wisht the boys dahn our street had seen it!"

"Ark at the dorgs."

"They can't find it. Whattl the dorgs do when they ketch the rabbit?"

Halbert, or Bert, was his name, he confided to the stranger, who could not help smiling with him. Bert smiled back most pleasantly. He said he was ten, and had come from Waterloo that morning, by motor. By hundreds of motor-buses and lorries. But he hadn't paid. Not bloomin likely. He and his companions had hung on to lorry tailboard and motor-bus footboard until detected and ordered off, when they waited for another. Cor, it was lovely in the country, mister. 'E was coming 'unting again next Saturday, not 'arf 'e warn't. Strike him pink, it was better than the pictures. 'E 'ad a grinnat at 'ome, 'e 'ad. What was a grinnat? Sorry, he meant a gr-heen hat. A grinnat, to wear onnisead. 'Is 'ead, where

'is 'air grew. Onnisead. Like a proper bloke 'unting. Would the rabbit bite the dorgs? 'E'd sin a rat bite a dorg dahn by the river. Could yer eat it when the dorgs caught it? What, the dorgs ate it? "Go on, whatsyernaime, ain't yer kidding?"

At last came the sailor called Gerry. He limped. When he saw Betty he came towards her, trying hard, it appeared to the observant stranger, to walk without the limp. She did not move. He glanced at the stranger as he came near. A reserved, impersonal glance, but the other thought there was an anxiety behind it. He wondered how the sailor had lost a finger; there was a scar on his hollow cheek; his limp. Perhaps splinters of a German shell, or a flight of nickel machine-gun bullets, at Zeebrugge. His eyes were thoughtful and steady. Yet when he looked at her his gaze faltered. He was in love with her. The stranger thought that she scorned him. They spoke.

"How's the leg, Gerry?"

"Bit stiff, Betty. Sorry I couldn't keep up with you."

"Have some chocolate?"

"Not now, thanks."

He gave some to the urchin.

"Thank you, guv'nor," said Halbert. "Sorry yer leg ain't all right."

"Thanks," smiled his patron, and the girl gave an amused sidelong glance, slightly disdainful, at his rags. They moved away a few minutes later.

The sun was failing, and it was chilly after the hot rays. Then the stranger saw the hare. It appeared on a grassy border near the house. It dragged itself slowly, a few steps at a time, this little brother of the clover fields. It was wet and exhausted, its ears laid back, its innocent eyes dulled with approaching death. Its splendid heart, which enabled it to spring out of its form swiftly, was failing now, for the long chase had clogged blood and muscle. It seemed to be pulling itself along, trying to reach the cover of a holly bush, where it might hide itself and die. The stranger remained silent, thinking among other things of that famous nineteenth-century sportsman of the West Country, Parson Jack Russell, who once had leapt a five-barred gate before harriers in order to pick up in his arms an exhausted hare. He remained still, despising himself, unable either to holloa or to pick it up. But Halbert the urchin was no craven.

"There's the rabbit, whats-yer-naime!"

"Hush."

"What's up with it, mister?"

"It's broken its heart with running."

"Lorlumme. Will it bite yer?"

"No, it's the gentlest animal alive."

Halbert stared a moment, and a tear dripped from his nose.

"It's a —— shame, mister!" he whined. He used an obscene word before "shame," or rather, "shime."

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The hare dragged itself another three inches. Hounds were babbling fifty yards away, unseen, behind the house.

"Shall I rescue it, mister?"

"Yes! Go and take it," he whispered. No one was near.

"Yer won't split if I do, guv'nor?"

"No."

"Take yer oath on it?"

"Yes."

"Spit through yer 'and?"

Thus adjured, the other spat through his hand. Bert looked round furtively before climbing the fence. He ran to the hare and picked it up. It did not struggle, being stiff. He held it under an arm and ran with it out of sight into the rhododendron bushes. The stranger listened with beating heart, but his unsporting behaviour had apparently passed undetected.

About half an hour later the huntsman threw up, and drew the allotments, through which they had run, as he thought that the hare might be lying out there. The sterns of the little jelly-dogs wagged eagerly as ever, and the more excitable babbled occasionally. Through the fields they went. The north-west wind was cooler, the sunbeams more yellow, the moon was pale in the afternoon sky. Several hounds bit corn-blades in a field; there would be no more scent that day. Through the fields they walked, those who had not gone home, towards the village where they

had met in the morning, to take up coats and change shoes left at the Feathers Inn.

While standing in the dim passage within, smoking his pipe and holding a tankard of ale, the stranger heard voices in a room. The door was opposite him and half open. He could see in a mirror the head of Betty. Her hat was thrown on the floor. Perhaps they were awaiting an egg tea, as they sat by the fire. He made no movement. In a few minutes he would be leaving Surrey in the London train, and probably never see her again. He looked in the mirror. She could not see him, as he stood in darkness, a long shadow of a man, for she was surrounded by light. The sailor said:

"Who was that tall dark fellow, following you, Betty?"

"I don't know. I've never seen him out before."

"I rather liked the look of him."

She shrugged her shoulders. The stranger was forgotten.

"Sorry I couldn't keep up, Bets." The sailor spoke in a restrained voice. She looked at him, and smiled her peculiar smile.

"Poor old Gerry," she said a few seconds later.

"Bet," he said unevenly, "are you really angry because I didn't interfere when that boy took the hare? I couldn't, Bet. I've dragged myself like that, and I know. Bet, they say animals don't feel, but I——"

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"Hush!" she interrupted, touching lightly his hand. "You mustn't talk like that; I've told you so before."

She mocked him still. He stared into the fire and was dumb. Long ago the stranger felt as the other was feeling then. She despised pity, thinking it weakness. Hopeless to try and explain. He fell into a reverie, in which his thoughts seemed to burn away in the brightness of his vision, until all was a celestial radiance. At the end of the world, he stood . . . almost all spirit. At the end of the world, when pity was shining and free and one with beauty in the white radiance of eternity, the lonely ones would be understood. . . . So he thought, in agitation . . . then saw actual objects again. Betty. He had been wrong about Betty, for the mirror revealed a strange look on her face. Her companion, with the downcast head, did not see it. Her lips were parted and she was smiling in the way that a virgin smiles to herself when suddenly she feels she can resist no more, but must surrender to love. Never again could she torment him. Oh, she was young and beautiful and her eyes were misty with love. As the sailor would not look up she leaned forward and took his broken hand. She said something to him. The shadow in the passage dared not gaze any more, but gulped his beer and, pushing the entrance door, went outside and along the road to the station.

He had to hobble back, with the tankard he had

absent-mindedly taken away with him. Returning to the road which the motor-buses from London used he saw at a corner of a lane Halbert and his three companions sitting on the bank under the hedge. They were sharing a cigarette, and Halbert was ending what appeared to be his account of the hunt.

"Yuss," his voice was saying dramatically, "it didden 'arf bite the dorgs! 'Lumme, I won't 'ave one left,' cried the bloke wiv the grinnat onnisead. "Ere mate, I says to im, 'give us yer whip,' and I dashed in and dots it one on the boko. Crikey, boys, it didden 'arf come for me. I 'it it 'arder and 'arder, and when it was dead the bloke says to me, 'e says, 'you kin 'ave it, me boy, and thank you fer saving me dorgs, and tell yer ma to cook it fer Sundis dinner,' he says."

"Blime," murmured his pals, stroking the dead hare hidden in one of the large pockets of Halbert's tunic.

The writer of little stories heard the train coming into the station and broke into a run. He was just in time, and in a carriage by himself tried to pick with his tie-pin four black thorns out of his hand.

THE FIVE LIVES OF THE ISLE-OF- WIGHT PARSON

Since the Romans, proud and civilized and stupid, ate their dishes made of the tongues of nightingales snared in the hazel brakes of Vectis, the Isle-of-Wight has been a famous fragment of the earth. Rising out of the Channel four miles off the southern coast of England, the diamond-shaped island covers Portsmouth, the Admiralty base British sailors call Pompey; and gives to Southampton docks those double tides which, lapsing and flowing east and west along its northern seaboard by Spithead and Solent, have made the port great.

For most men the printed name has some sort of association. It may be the white sails of the Royal Yacht Squadron, recollected, perhaps, only from the picture-newspapers; or the hollow roar of the swift and dreaded Race that tears its way between isle and mainland, shifting course with every tide, and marked as by sharks' teeth on its broken wave-tops. Some will be reminded of Keats and the goldfinches; others of the green rose which was seen first in the village of Bonchurch, growing in a graveyard. Queen Victoria and the Royal Family at Osborne, Tennyson, Swinburne,—the Isle holds many tales of the

illustrious dead; but one tale of the living there is that is scarcely known: the tale of the Isle-of-Wight Parson who, in the afternoon of July the Eleventh, some years after the Great War, was tarred and feathered, while tied to the corpse of his brother.

It was one of many persecutions for which sailors of unknown ships were partly responsible. There was, it may be remembered, some correspondence in the principal London papers, and a leading article in *The Times*. Individual members of both Houses—prominently the Viscount Grey of Fallodon—were anxious for an international agreement to prevent such cruelty; but the Governments of Europe were much too busy thinking about the Red Menace, War Debts, the re-arming of Europe, and other phenomena of obsolescent thought, to worry about the case of an Isle-of-Wight Parson.

I knew old Phalacrocorax well. This, by the way, is his correct surname, and not, as the ignorant may suppose, if they have read so far, a fictitious one. Phalacrocorax is a grand and crisp name, like walking on a beach of shells—the educated will know the Greek derivation of the family name, *φαλακρός* and *κόραξ*—but the Parson's appearance did not remind me of the beach by Morte Hoe when first I brought him home after his ordeal. He was covered with tar and feathers, except for his naked throat. His head, entirely hairless, was long and narrow, and

his nostrils were so small, a natural defect, that he was forced to breathe through his mouth, which was devoid of teeth. He lived with me for several weeks, and I grew to be fond of him, and so did my dog; but the cat fled from him. There were times, I must admit, when I too preferred him at a distance, as when the air was moist and the wind in the south, my nose not liking him then as much as my curiosity.

I brought him to the village during the darkness and quiet of night, but in the morning the sound of his complaining voice brought children, passing down the street to school, to the threshold. The postman looked in also, with the farmer who lives opposite, and the gardener at the Rectory. The gardener told the Rector of the Parish Church, who came hurrying round.

"They tell me something dreadful about an Isle-of-Wight Parson"—he began, and stopped, with his eyes fixed behind the settle, where on a heap of straw the Parson was hiding. After some moments of staring the Rector cried,

"But he has got a piece of iron stuck in his throat!"

I told him how it had got there. He screwed up his face in horror, and after some moments of imagining how it would feel if it were in his own throat, he said earnestly,

"Do you know, Williamson, I think it would be for the best if you were to knock him on the head, and bury him. I should do it by night if I

were you, when no little children would be about to see you."

I told him that I had only just dug him out of a grave, where he had been buried alive. The Rector wrinkled his brow in pity, and murmured in a placid voice, "It is very sad to think that men can be so cruel in England. Do I know the men or man, I wonder, but do not tell me if you would rather not."

"I don't mind telling you," I replied. "It was Bill Crang."

"Oh!" said the Rector, raising his eyebrows in a facial gesture which was meant to convey complete understanding. "Ah!" he added, and pursed his lips, and frowned, and nodded his head several times, slowly, to himself, before looking at me and smiling a peculiar smile. That smile was meant to show his hopeless thoughts about William Crang, the Chapel preacher, for of course the Rector could not speak against anyone in the parish.

When I had told my Rector the whole story of the Isle-of-Wight Parson, he asked me to write it for the Parish Magazine. I did so, but it troubled the good priest. He returned it to me, and deeply regretted that he could not publish it for several reasons, one being that it was too long, another (the chief) reason that he thought people would be offended by some of my critical remarks. I assured him that they were not meant to be critical: that I had no dogmatic

bias: that my description of Bill Crang was the mere truth.

"I do not doubt your sincerity, my dear boy," he said in his kind way, placing a hand on my shoulder, "but I am certain that few people will understand your remarks about the Bible."

"They are true," I protested, "with reference to the type of mind, the common type, such as Bill Crang possesses. I like Bill personally. He's all right, except for his ideas! And I read the Bible more often than you, who see me in your church about twice a year, may suspect. As for the New Testament, I am upheld by the radiance of the Man who inspired it, by the divine spirit so infinitely beyond the comprehension of the little minds which would interpret Him. Bill Crang's every wooden utterance is a voiceless cry for Barrabas."

The Rector smiled patiently and sadly. I knew that he thought I was all right, except for my ideas.

He said, "Well, my dear boy——" smiled the end of the sentence, and went away.

I was left with the Isle-of-Wight Parson. . . .

As Bill Crang was directly responsible for most of the persecution, I must explain what sort of a man he was. I know nothing about the village chapel, except what I have heard through partly open windows while loitering outside in summer; and the quality of the sermons on each occasion

did not fill me with eagerness to gaze upon the features of the teacher inside. So I declined the various invitations of Bill Crang to go with him on Sunday afternoons to his place of worship. The fellow was always trying to save my soul from some devil or other with whom he had had, apparently, an intimate acquaintance in his youth. Once, angered by what he called my "orribly eathenish attitood"—because I said that Jehovah, the jealous god of an extinct tribe, was the equivalent of an idol—he refused to sail me over the estuary, declaring that he didden want no thunderbolt o' vengeance dropped through his boat, which was not insured.

"It will sink by itself before long, so why should you think that an all-seeing Providence would be so stupid as to use the force of gravity and a fragment of a ruined planet to destroy your old tub?" I shouted after him, as he shoved off.

Marooned among the sandhills, I slept in a ferny hollow, and when at dawn I saw the sun's tide flooding the eastern estuary of heaven, how glad I was that I had not gone home. The dew was on the mosses, and the bog pimpernels, tiny and numerous as pink raindrops at my feet, were waking out of their petals to steal heaven's gold breath for their seeds. Larks sang high above the white vapour that hid the distant grazing marsh, and all but the horned heads of cattle. My spaniel and I ran shouting to the sea. Soon I stood on the broken shells of the strand, naked in the

beams of the sun and the spray of the waves, alone with the sandpipers who are pure in spirit as man's starry thoughts. I ran for a plunge, and they sped down the estuary. One behind the other the green translucent breakers rose for their foamy fall, seven of them regular and fish-shaped, and followed by three great combers which reared and curled and roared over my head, flinging the coloured sun-dogs behind me. I worked my slow way through the surf, to be lifted gently by the seven that came after, but the next great trio beat me under. I gasped into sunlight, amid water that was quiet, and I rested, while an old bull seal looked at me with his grey filmy eyes. So near was he that I could see the water blown from his nostrils as he breathed. He filled his lungs and rolled under a wave, for he was hunting a run of salmon which had come over the bar with the tide.

I swam to the shore, finding my spaniel on my clothes with a young rabbit he had caught. There was driftwood for a fire, and when we had eaten our meal, and he had gone after the next, I wandered on a spit of shingle, where, above the line of dry brittle sea-weed left by the highest spring-tide, the ring-plover lay their eggs, so like pebbles and shells that even the carrion crows seldom find them. The sun grew hot, the tide ebbed, and smoke had been rising from the chimneys of the village over the water for some time when I saw an open boat drifting down

derelict upon the sandbank in mid-estuary. The sandbank was bare, except for a black, as though gowned, figure standing motionless by the water-side, near the upjutting fluke of the anchor that held the mooring chain of the buoy. The figure was that of the Isle-of-Wight Parson, who had not moved for more than an hour. Many times had I watched him on the sandbank as the tide ebbed, usually at the same place, turned towards the east, his mouth open, and standing in a cruciform attitude which was so familiar to the fishermen of the estuary.

The open boat turned slowly as it drifted. It was tarred, with white gunwales, with the number of its owner's salmon licence painted white on its bows. The figures were legible through my glass. It was Bill Crang's boat, and as I looked, I realized the danger to the Parson. I stood and watched, while the ring-plover ran over the shingle near me, suddenly pausing as though changed to stones. Their wistful faint piping passed with them over sand and stick and shell of that desolate place, one calling another in its quiet distress. I was near their young.

How could I tell the Parson of his danger? Already in my mind I could see the red tinge of summer wavelets lapsing from the sandbank, after the shot had broken him, and his body lay in the bright water, one with its shadow. Death! When the moving sun-shadow is stilled, and one is, perchance, already a shade! Why should this

poor Isle-of-Wight Parson be persecuted, when really he did no harm, except to take some of the fish that the fishermen of the estuary deemed it their own right to catch?

I wanted to warn him by shouting, but I had not the courage of my desire. The boat was drifting nearer to the ridge of sand on which he stood. An empty boat, apparently, moving with the ebb; but I knew that Bill Crang was lying under the gunwales, with a loaded gun beside him. There was no wind. The waters of sea and river were slackening, the buoy marking the ridge end (at high water) was spinning quite slowly. Through my glass I could see the red of rust and the green of weed on the riveted iron plates of the great sea-top, which every tide whipped into a rolling spin. A gull was perching on the stem, its yellow eye fixed on the drifting salmon boat. The gull uttered an angry yakker, for it had flown over the boat and seen the enemy.

No suspicion came to the solitary figure standing where the wavelets carried their stolen sun-threads to the shallow, to be yielded on the sand. The Parson was dozing after his meal, his head thrown back, with three fishtails sticking out of his open mouth. The sand near his feet was pitted irregularly by the salt water which had dripped from him.

Nearer and nearer drifted the open boat. In less than a minute it would be within gunshot of the Parson. Others were watching across the

water, but without the same feelings for the safety of the insignificant black figure. The death of a Parson affected the fishermen smoking on the quay about as much as the death of a bass or a salmon.

When the Parson saw the gun, and Bill's fist and arm, and then his head, as he took aim over the gunwale, he jumped. The Parson's voice was naturally deep and rather hoarse, but now it was buried under a load of half-digested fish. Even then, his strangled cries were borne over the water to where I stood watching him within the circle of my glass. He tried to throw up his dinner, which was so heavy that it hindered him. He waddled through the shallows to reach deeper water, uttering shrieks and groans and gurglings, but before he could reach deep water Bill Crang fired, and the Parson fell on his side.

I watched the fisherman wading after the body, saw him pick it up, and carry it with the head trailing in the water to where his boat was nosing the sandbank with its iron shoe. He heaved it over the stern, pushed the boat afloat, and with easy dip of oars drifted down to me.

Bill and I talked, and it was then he tried to persuade me to go to the Chapel on the following afternoon. I said, to have fun with him, that I heard he was about to become a Catholic.

"There's none of them sort in 'Eaven," he warned me solemnly, and started to tell me why. How he talked! And how that very solemn

Anglo-Saxon quoted those old Jewish polygamists! He knew the Old Testament by heart. Everything he believed literally. His mind would never change. While he was quoting the wrathful phrases which were meaningless under the sweet blue sky as the bloody sacrifices which used to accompany them in the original Hebrew, I could see so clearly that his way of thinking was the way of darkness, of hate, of wars, of crucifixion, of needless suffering. It was sad to hear him, but my sadness was momentary. It would be so easy to laugh at Bill Crang. But the next moment I was glad that he was talking at me, sitting on the bows of his boat with his back to the Parson, for then he did not see what I saw, and that was a small eye opening, and taking a look round. No other movement except the blinking of a small emerald eye.

The Parson's eye had a wary look in it. Then his mouth opened as though with astonishment that he was lying in a boat, and the same boat, too, in which he had nearly died before. For he had been caught three days previously in Bill Crang's net, and hauled out of the purse gasping and feebly kicking, to be held by the feet with his head underwater until Bill Crang considered him drowned. While being rowed to the village he had stood up, coughed a sort of fish soup over Bill's head, and dived overboard.

"So you think, Mr. Crang," I said loudly, for the Parson was beginning to raise his head, "that

I can avert the sulphur dioxide of this place, this diabolical place, you speak of, only by standing up to my middle in water while your minister baptises me?"

"Aiy aiy," replied Bill stoutly, and the next moment a small hard shower came upon us. It rattled in the boat, and made a few spirts in the water. The Parson, who had been only stunned by the shot, was shaking the lead pellets out of his hard quills, after which, with a hoarse and doleful cry, he flew off down the estuary. The flight of his riddled black wings made a sighing whistle as he flew straight and low over the waters, after the manner of cormorants. Watching through my glass, I saw him brake with tail and wings and feet, saw the water torn as he slowed and settled, when he stood up, nearly as big as a goose, and flapped his wings to tighten the feathers for diving. He was hungry, having left his dinner at the edge of the sandbank for the gulls.

Next morning I saw him, one of a row of seven, perched on the sandbank. Four of them had the tails of mullet sticking out of open beaks. Their wings were held out to dry in the sun, and they worked their shoulder joints in order to shake down the fish which were distending their gullets. I recognized the Parson by his ragged appearance, and by the gaps in his flight quills. He was trying to smarten himself up by oiling them from the gland in his back above the tail.

Somebody else was watching the seven Isle-of-

Wight Parsons, too, and that was Bill Crang. I must tell you that the Board of Conservators paid a shilling for every Parson's head brought into the chief water-bailiff's office, and money, of course, was the real guiding force of Bill Crang; a fearful concern for one's whereabouts after death can hardly be called religion. Seven Parson's heads meant seven shillings for Bill to put in the box under his bed, which was supposed to hold over five hundred pounds, all in small silver. One may wonder why all this money wasn't in the bank, or invested? Because Bill didn't want anyone to know how much he was worth. Like most of the people in the village, he was sensitive—no, that's the wrong word—he was cunning about his money. As a sort of camouflage, he would refer to his poverty. He was not a miser, but his pennies and sixpences had been gained laboriously. He had been wet in sea-labour nearly all his life, and never had any boots or shoes until he was thirteen years old. His wife was childless, so why, one may ask, was Bill so thrifty? Because he liked working, because the thought of increase—which, I remembered, was the Earth's thought—inspired him to continue to store up treasure for the heaven, or haven, of old age. Hard work and hard preaching meant security in this world and the next for Bill Crang.

So Bill got out his line and hooks, and at high tide went what fishermen called rough-fish-catching, that is, any fish for the taking of which

no licence was required. (A May to September licence for salmon and sea-trout was five pounds.) Bill caught several bass with his line, using bait of sand-eels, and the smaller ones he didn't bang on the head, but threw them alive in the well of the boat. When the tide was ebbing he went down to the buoy and made fast the line to the stem. Then he foul-hooked the smaller live bass, and dropped them overboard. The tide went seawards in swirls and eddies, the ridge of the sandbank showed its newest ribs, the leaning buoy in its dreary spinning wound and unwound the line. Every minute the sandbank grew wider and longer, and an hour before slackwater the seven Parsons flew in from the sea and began to fish.

It may be of interest to know how *Phalacrocorax Carbo* (as he is known in museums) or the Isle-of-Wight Parson (as his kind had been called in the estuary before museums were made) caught his prey. When he was swimming under-water the short oily feathers of his head, neck, and back used to reflect streaks of light at all angles around and below him. These streaks gleamed like the sides of small fish shoaling, and seeing them above, cod, bass, pollack, and other fish would swim up for a meal. The Parson, cruising in a fathom of water, would espy the gleam of a big fish, and race in pursuit of it. The wide webs of his black feet would drive his lean body swiftly through the water. A small fish of less than a pound in weight

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he would swallow underwater, but if it was big, usually he swam up with it. When on the surface again he would fling it up to catch it by the head, and swallow it. Sometimes when the sea was calm the Parson would watch while swimming with his head underwater, but usually he prowled in a zigzag course to the bed of the estuary.

On this afternoon I could imagine him swimming far down in the green crab-haunted waters, past stone-fastened weed which streamed with the tide, his wings pressed close to his sides, and moving at the pace of a trotting horse. The lean head on the long neck swung up. There was the gleam of a fish turning above him. With decisive kicks of his feet he thrust upwards, blowing a string of bubbles in his excitement. The bass sped up the fairway, the Parson following, slim with his speed. Over the buoy's mooring chain, covered with mussels, went bass and cormorant, the bird following every twist and swerve of the fish. Suddenly the fish stopped, and hung still in two fathoms of water, the unseen line taut from it to the surface. The Parson braked with fourteen short tail feathers and two wide webs, and slid upon the fish, while the agitation of the sheared water arose and spun itself away in two buttons of foam on the surface. The bass was seized in the long beak with its preying curved upper mandible. It weighed three pounds, which was quite big enough for the Parson, but not too big to be gulped down when he swum into air and

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sunshine again. While he was shaking it into his gullet the fish was jerked away, but he caught it, and the hook fixed through the bass' side stuck in his throat.

Who can tell the agony of two birds pulling against each other for freedom, the frantic swimming rush upon each other, up the estuary against the ebb, down with the current, then in opposite directions again, until the agonizing jerk checked them with a force which would have snapped the neckbones of less rapacious birds. The Parsons (who had been reared in the same home, *i.e.* on the same heap of rotting seaweed and fish) could not understand what was preventing them from flying. They dived, they cried, they bled, until they were weak, when they lay in the water with only their heads showing while they gasped for the air of life, hiding thus lest the dread enemy should observe them.

II

The buoy, after its hour upright, leaned wearily towards the mainland, and the flow whipped it into a sluggish spin. Night came with its stars, the moon looked down on the unresting waters, and tarnished the troughs of waves. The five other Parsons were asleep on their roosting rock on the distant Isle. Salmon came over the bar, the bull seal after them, and the seal caught

one of the hooked bass, and the barb of the hook fastened in the flesh of his throat. Mad with fear and pain he beat his flippers against the tide, dragging the two brothers on the line after him. Soon, however, he champed through the line, and the birds were free, except for each other. When daylight came they were a mile from the land, and still trying to be themselves again. First one would dive to escape from the line, and pull the other under; and the other, terrified by an unknown enemy dragging it down to drown and devour it, would swim up and break the waters, a very sea-scarecrow to the gulls as it flapped and ran in the wave troughs before flying. It would fly until a tautened line flung it as though shot in mid-air, to tumble into the water with harsh cries.

After many days his brother died, and the corpse was dragged behind the Parson when by day he swam into the undersea world, soundless in its green gloom except for the throbbing beats which began when the currents set eastward. Southampton was miles away, yet the pulses of ships' screws travelled far under the Solent tides. The Parson was tortured by hunger, for he could catch only the smallest fishes. At night he slept among the waves, while from a cold and starless grave his dead brother swayed and beckoned as the currents filled its wings. Sometimes he was awakened by a tug on his head, and he had to struggle for air with web and wing,

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while the tug, tug, tug, on the line continued. Conger eels were pulling at the body far below.

These fish, so cold and powerful and slimy, tore the flesh of the corpse until the wings swayed on a frame of bones. Crabs picked out tongue and eyes, but even then the little fish were frightened by it, as it fled and bowed through the depths. Sharks and dogfish stared at it, sting-rays with blue bellies swam from the gape of its beak. Once the line drew it through an eddy about a skeleton resting on the bottom, a skeleton many times as big as itself, with the frames of its wings hung with barnacles. There were bones and skulls about this frame, and rusty engines shunned by crabs. Warped and split ply-wood of propellers looked like giant human hands held up for warning from the netherworld. The line drew the Parson's skeleton across a machine gun, in the handles of which its legbones became entangled; once, twice, thrice, the line jerked it on,—but it was finished, like the airmen and their seaplane, and the ways of life beckon the dead in vain. It stayed; but the head, the shilling head, was pulled from the neck.

That was the end of the Parson's brother, and although the headless skeleton in the machine gun has a further history, it has no place in a story which tells of life and hope.

Phalacrocorax Carbo, the Isle-of-Wight Parson, lived on among the waves, carrying wherever he went twenty yards of barked hempen line tied to

a galvanized iron hook fixed in his throat. How thin he was! The herring gulls watched him. They rode the invisible wind waves in beautiful grey flight, watching the sea with pitiless yellow eyes. Other diving birds they passed over in their slow sailing, but when they saw the Parson their level wings shifted, they banked for a turn, and lay above him. The Parson paddled faster as he cocked a green anxious eye. The gulls cried their vague flock-cries, of which no man knows the meaning. It was not the harsh selfish jabber of excitement during a food scramble, as when a shoal of whitebait, or a dead porpoise, lies near the surface; it was not the screaming mutter of parental alarm. Men hear the flock-cries before a storm, when the birds are going inland; and old fishermen believe (but do not like to say in these radio days) that the bewailing spirits of drowned sailors are in the bodies of grey gulls. The flock-cry is impersonal, like the loud wail of insanity's laughter, terrifying to man by its waste and mock of sunlight's spirit.

The imagination of *Phalacrocorax* was not so small that the gull's cries did not affect him. He got away from them as quickly as he could. They waited for him to swim up; indeed, they watched him all the while he was submerged. They could see the line slanting behind him, and the head at its other end. More gulls drifted over, and cried the wild flock-cry. Two glided to within a yard of the Parson, their trailing feet an inch from the

sea. They lifted their wings above their backs, settled on the water, and folded them. Others alighted with grey and white hastelessness. The Parson dived from them.

A breeze sprang up in the afternoon, when they could not see him swimming below, so they circled in a screaming flock while they waited to tear from his beak any fish he caught and brought to the surface. I know this because I saw them from a sailing boat. The gulls screamed as I tacked after the Parson, who could fly about a score of yards before the weight of the line compelled him to flop into the water. Once we got to within boathook length of him, but he dived before I could snatch the line. We chased him for nearly two hours. It was hot in the boat, which smelt of new paint, so I got out of my clothes and went overboard when he appeared to be exhausted, while my wife took the tiller. I had been swimming for several minutes when she cried,

“You’re absolutely filthy!”

At the same time I noticed the brown smears on my hands and arms. I was swimming with many curious dark bubbles level with my eyes. Whenever one touched my face it left a cluster of minute bubbles which broke and smeared my skin. I tried to rub off some of the smears, and found that I was only rubbing them in the more. Where the smirches were, the water ran off. And among these swarms of bubbles floated what

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looked like fragments of decayed moss. I climbed back into the boat, and saw that we were moving in a patch of placid sea discoloured by the false rainbows of crude petroleum. The moss-like stuff was everywhere, in belts of dark scum which on touching the bows left a mark as of tar there. We saw the Parson rise some distance away, and watched him trying to fly. He flapped his wings vainly. His flight quills were clogged. He beat water over himself to clean them, the water of the false rainbows.

We tried to rescue him, pursuing him with the boathook until the low sun reddening in the sea vapours gave warning of the late hour. We left him gasping and bedraggled in the scum of oil-fuel cast overboard after the tank-cleaning of unknown ships. Perhaps some of it had come from the ships sunk by submarines during the Great War, or from the submarines sunk by other ships. The sun went down, and the small speck was lost to sight.

Sometimes a great liner from New York, tearing the Channel into whitest rage, bore down upon him so swiftly that he could not swim away in time. Then he would dive, to be thrown about in a darkness of roaring foam which shifted even the crabs on the bed of the sea. Week after week he endured the long agony of flightlessness. He saw other diving birds that were victims of oil-fuel, guillemots with long sharp dusky beaks and brown

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breasts that should have been white, terns who in happier days had graced the air like swallows, and miserable shags, who had left their communal perching rocks for ever.

The gulls robbed them of nearly every fish they caught, and waited for their dead bodies. One morning these gulls went inland, wailing the flock-cries. The wind went after them, hurling them along like feathers, so high were they. The storm wind could leave nothing alone—that blind and restless and uncared-for wind that drives as it is blindly driven. It harried the grey old wrinkled sea, and tore the hair of its billows. With furious gestures it set the rollers to their ancient tasks in slavery, of battering rocks, rolling buoys, tossing boats at their estuary moorings, breaking the slips and jetties of the quay. It knew not the living from the dead, being old and blind before life began. The sea heaved and hollowed where the Parson was swimming, the foam rolled upon his tail as he trod down a wave. He drifted into an area where waves were smoothed and controlled, their crests held under an oily skin. He paddled through it, while the wind wrinkled the sea's false skin, and a little bird ran with fragile feet up the sullen swell, sipping oil in its beak. It skated away in the wind to play under a wave-top, and when the wave reared and fell, lo! the little bird was under another. For hundreds of miles it had run with the storm, a darling sprite that knew only joy

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where men and birds found fear. Deep-water men said this little winged one carried its egg under a nimble pinion, and hatched it there: for how can it otherwise nest, they asked, when we have seen it in the middle of the Atlantic?

Mother Cary's Chicken, as they call the Stormy Petrel, left the Parson, and went its light way in the sombre mists. The estuary village lay north-east from the patch of oil-fuel, and the wind was taking the Parson home. It could care nothing, it could know nothing, of what would happen to a bird driven helpless to the very quays of its enemies who would be rewarded for its head. Throughout the night it drove him nearer land, past a buoy bearing in an iron cage a bell which clanged drearily in a grey-green waste of sea. When daylight came the Parson was in the estuary, striving in vain to swim out of the fairway where the force of the flood tide was throwing a plume of water over the stem of the rusty ridge buoy. Gush of wind and set of current carried the weak bird to the shore, and the surge flung him up.

He could crawl on the elbows of his wings. Dimly aware that the pounding surge would break him, he dragged himself to the rocks discovered by the last tide, rocks which for ages had been known as stumps and fangs and were now many feet high. In the shelter of one of the monoliths he lay for more than an hour, until he was found by a dog, who called a man

by barking. The Parson was too feeble to peck with his hooked beak, too feeble to beat ragged wings. He lay on his side with closed eyes. The yapping of the dog grew louder as its master approached. Thus the Isle-of-Wight Parson, who had escaped death by water, lead, iron, and oil, fell into the hands of Bill Crang for the third time, to be picked up and carried to his home, by way of the quay, where stood an aged sailor with swollen legs, known as Old Mast-and-Yards, who nodded approvingly, and said in a slow voice cracked like his ancient sea-boots :—

“ If thee buries un for a week, and then thee bakes un wi’ tetties and a bit o’ bacon, ’er will taste proper midear, like a turkey, ’er will, surenuff.”

“ Aiy aiy,” replied Bill Crang, and passed on. He wouldn’t eat no Pass’n, like they ould deep-sea chaps.

It was Old Mast-and-Yards who told me about the capture of the Parson a few minutes after Bill Crang had passed him. I went down to the sands in order to see if any other divers had been washed ashore in the gale, and following the heavy footsteps of Bill Crang, I reached the rock where *Phalacrocorax* had taken refuge. Looking round the other sides, I found the fishing line which had been frayed against a sharp edge, and pulling it with difficulty out of the wet sand, I recovered the head on the hook. A shilling is a shilling these days—the price of an ounce of tobacco, of a

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pound of sausages, of a quart of beer—so I put it in my pocket, and went round to see Bill Crang.

I found him about to have his tea, to which he invited me. He said, pointing with a knife at the dish, "I must have my fry for tea, I must." The fry was pork chops, potatoes—"tetties"—kidneys, mushrooms, eggs, and black pudding—this last a favourite country dish, and made of the chopped chitterlings of the pig mixed with groats and barley, the whole savoured by the blood caught when the pig is stabbed. Bill loved it, the more since he had killed his pig himself, and saved the butcher's fee. He liked food in quantity, did old Bill. No wonder he bulged everywhere under his blue woollen slop and serge trousers. A bulky man, with fixed ideas, a hearty muncher of big mouthfuls, a hearty believer in a jealous Gawd ever ready to 'ur-rl the sinner into the fiery furnace of 'ell heverlasting furevurr'an'-evurr, brother! Hairs grew out of his ears and nostrils, his chest was a hair shirt unto itself.

Yet he was a good fellow, for he had asked me to tea out of his heart's kindness; partly, I knew, in order to help persuade me to join his Chapel, a thing for which he earnestly hoped.

"The Devil is everywhere!" he ejaculated, throwing down knife and fork, and wiping egg fragments off his lips with the back of his hand, and allowing the dog to lick it clean. The animal

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waited for more, while Bill gazed at me for several minutes without speaking. Whenever his gaze met mine it shifted either to the floor or the ceiling, and I imagined that he was either uncomfortable after his meal, or that he was collecting his thoughts for a series of remarks about the Devil.

He cleared his throat, tapped with his fingers on the arm of his chair, and let out a throaty, "Hur?"

I said, "What did you say, Mr. Crang?"

He replied, winking several times at me, while his head seemed to sink low into his shoulders, "You think I don't know nothing, don't you?"

"What's the matter?" I asked.

He winked again, with a heavy air of timid aggressiveness, said, "Hur?" and after a pause, "So yer wants to know, hur?"

"Tell me, Mr. Crang."

"With all yer studying and book-writing, yer don't know everything, so I'll ask yer now, Didden you once say as how you believed a bird had a soul like a human being?"

"Yes."

"Including a Hisle-o'-Wight Pass'n?"

"Why not?"

Bill Crang chuckled, and picked up a matchstick from the floor.

"What about Milton?"

I asked who Milton was.

"The celebrated poet as wrote 'Paradise Lost.' "

"Well, what about him?"

Three slow winks, more confident winks.

"You think I ain't got no scholarsd larning, huh? Milton wrote that poem when 'e were blind. Ye'll know it yerself, hur?"

I confessed that I was still young enough for the school-time distaste of Milton not to have left me; but ignoring my fragment of autobiography, he went on in a louder voice:

"I'm mentioning Milton in my address next Sunday, so ye'd better come and listen, hur? Well, then. Now Milton says in the fourth book of 'Paradise Lost' that the Devil sat like a cor-mor-ant on the highest tree of life. Cor-mor-ant, that was the Devil. Well, then. This yer Hisle-o'-Wight Pass'n, some folks, including Milton, calls the cor-mor-ant, although Hisle-o'-Wight Pass'n is the Hisle-o'-Wight Pass'n's proper name, huh?"

He was getting into stride now, the stride of Sunday afternoon.

"Answer me brother. Look into yer own soul, and ask yerself this question! Do I still 'old wi' the notion of a Hisle-o'-Wight Pass'n 'aving a soul when I 'ave jes' 'eard Will Crang say as ow Milton said as ow the Devil sat like a cor-mor-ant on the 'ighest tree o' life?"

I replied something about evolution.

"Hevverlution idden no sense!" said Bill, with much contempt, "Now look at me, and ask yerself, Do I look as though I were once a monkey?"

THE OLD STAG

That's all hevverlution is! Why, darnee midear, tidden about birds at all! Further, brother, suppose yer were to take a Hisle-o'-Wight Pass'n into Chapel, could a' sing a psalm? Could a' unnerstand God's Word, could a' know what I were a-saying? Get out, tidden no sense! Why, how would a Hisle-o'-Wight Pass'n conduct issell in a Holy Building?"

"Probably the bird, being natural and faithful to the forces which created it, as Man is seldom faithful, would do its best to get out of the building," I said.

"Exactly!" roared Mr. Crang, "And for why? Because the Devil created it for to take the fish which The Almighty put in the sea for Man to feed upon."

In the distance, beyond the closed door, I thought I heard a cry.

"Milton," declared he, "is now a statue in Westminster Abbey, which, I may tell you, is in London. Folks put a statue up to 'im. You and me won't get no statues, will us?"

Yes, it was a cry.

"You might get a statue" I suggested. His name was already gouged in a cement block on the Chapel wall. It had cost him five pounds.

He tried to look modest. He began, while contemplating the possibilities of a statue, to clean his few remaining teeth with the match. The small noises of his tongue at work were distinct with the brittle chirping of an elderly cricket

above the kitchen range; one heard below them the subdued roar of the sea. Again I heard the cry, and the dog heard it too, for with ears cocked he shifted to where the stream of the draught under the door would draw across his nostrils. Yes, it came again, a groaning in the darkness, and I thought of the bird whose burial had been urged by Old Mast-and-Yards. An unbearable thought.

"I think I hear something outside," I said to Bill.

"'Tis most probably they fool chaps up to pub," he replied.

Bill Crang never went into an inn, and he despised those who did.

"May I go in the garden?"

He waved permission with the burnt match. The subdued roar of the sea increased with the cold wind on my face as I opened the door, while holding the scruff of the dog lest it should slip past me. A word from its master made it sink on its paws, and blink its eyes. I closed the door, and listened, waiting for the daze of the table lamp to leave my eyes. The sky was clear and starry after the storm. Outlines of things grew near me; I could see boxes, barrels, oars, and other gear take shape around my feet, and beyond them, the stalks and leaves of cabbages and winter greens. I heard the sound of flapping, and moved with slow short steps down the garden, staring for guidance at the ground at my feet, which often

kicked empty tins and cracked shards of china and glass. The flapping ceased.

I suppose I had been standing still about a minute when a groan broke out of the ground before me, a groan prolonged and feeble, immensely saddening in its remembered association, for had I not heard a friend groan like that, after a week's writhing at a base-hospital, just before the spirit left the poor body pocked with the burns of a phosphorous bomb? The groan ceased in a long sigh, so startlingly human that my heart thumped with the abrupt change in my mental picture of what was before me. No bird would sigh like that! I peered into the gloom, and saw a pale luminous movement, which in silence uprose before me, and spread sideways, into the semblance of a headless cormorant.

It glimmered there. The ghost of the Parson ! The apparition had wings and a body, all dimly luminous, and wavering as though behind smoke.

My back went cold, my hair moved.

"I am observing a rising from the dead; this is an astral body; such a rising must have begun the legend of the phoenix," these thoughts ran in my head, while I watched with a curious detachment of unreality in which I did not completely believe that such a thing could really happen. The ghost stood with outspread wings for perhaps five seconds, a phoenix risen in what strange fire—those wings flapped, and oh! they wafted upon me a most sickening stench of rotten fish.

THE ISLE-OF-WIGHT PARSON

The wretched Parson was not dead. Bill Crang had flung what he believed to be the corpse in his dressing pit, with cabbage stalks, old fish and other such stuff put down to rot for next spring's top-dressing, or manure. The Parson had lain there spread-winged and on his breast until he had recovered from the sea-buffeting. Perhaps the familiar phosphorescent glimmering—familiar because in spring every nesting rock is strewn with the waste catch of cormorants—had helped to revive him. Bruised and hurt by the waves and rocks, his flight quills clogged as with tar, his tongue pierced by a hook and nearly pulled from his throat, the flesh of his breast pitted by shot, scraggy from starvation and sleeplessness: thus was the Isle-of-Wight Parson whom I took home in a sack to my cottage, to be fed, and tended, until he was well again.

We turned over every large stone in two miles of the stream, for the eels which lived there; we gave him dead rats and dog biscuits soaked in warm water; we stood for hours on the sands at low tide with rods in our hands for the taking of bass which fed on sand-eels in the breakers. All day we sought food for him. Still he flapped and croaked for more.

One day, when he had swallowed a bucketful of fish as fast as I tossed them to him, my wife said,

"He's quite well, except that he can't fly. Why not make him catch his own food?" And she added, excitedly, "I say, why not food for us

too? With a ring round his neck, so that he can't swallow the big fish!"

"Rather!" I cried. "We'll put the kitten's collar round his neck."

So the Parson was taken out in the boat, and he dived off a thwart carrying a thin line on a little collar round his neck, and swam under for nearly a minute. He came up with a lovely red mullet, which he tried to swallow, and swam about until we took it from him. That night we had a fine supper, while the Parson slept in a shed behind the cottage, tired after the labour of so much swimming and swallowing.

We kept him (or rather, he kept us) throughout the mild winter, and in the New Year he was so tame that he would follow us up the village street. When he flapped his wings, he looked just like a worn-out umbrella, torn and greenish with weather and blown inside-out. In February, however, he shed his old ruined feathers, and took on a new set, which gleamed with bronzy hues; and gay new white ones grew on his thighs, which had not been there when we got him. How could we keep him when we knew how much more those white feathers would be appreciated by eyes that were emerald? So the collar was taken off him, and put on its real owner, a cat. Phalacrocorax was taken to the beach in the sidecar, and he flew off over his native sea. We know that he found a mate, and soon they were carrying bunches of seaweed to a rock where six other cormorants

THE ISLE-OF-WIGHT PARSON

were nest building. And for awhile I fancy they will be safe, for the Fishery Board, which must needs economise because we have such big War Debts to pay back, has abolished the reward for their destruction. The last shilling paid by the Board, it may be of interest to know, was paid to one who signed himself W. CRANG, who tendered a head whose eyes and tongue had been picked out by crabs; the head, I believe, that he had readily accepted in exchange for the Isle-of-Wight Parson.

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We discovered it from the top of a horse-bus, and clattering off at the "Green Man," set out across the rutty road to explore the jungle at its far western shore. By a gap in the fence we stopped, whispering *Cave!* for a policeman was standing by the omnibus. At last he strolled out of our sight. Dare we? After moments of quick heart-beating, of thoughts of being caught, birched, and sent to a Reformatory, we crept through the gap and ran for the cover of sedges. A moorhen flew out, and in fear we threw ourselves flat, and wriggled into hiding. We got home at nine o'clock that night, and were sent to bed without supper, for having fallen into the water.

I remember trout lying in the sluice of the mill-wheel below the culvert. Roach roamed along the weed-beds, grass-green of back when the sun lit the water. Kingfishers, perching on snags, looked at their own bright images, and very early in the misty morning a grey heron stood on the rushes, sharp of beak to spear the brown voles which burrowed in the banks. The acre of water was fed by a brook, where wild duck splashed in winter. Sometimes at night the miller heard the whistles of a roaming dog-otter, and the moon

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jigged in broken gold where its flat head set the ripples spreading. The spirit of the water was joyous as it flowed through the green Kent country, long ago.

Nowadays the waters of the pond are false-coloured with tar and oil from the road. The trout are dead, and hundreds of metal caps of beer bottles lie below the culvert, dirty-white in the water, the saloon-bar Sunday trade of the red-brick public house nearby. The fire-bellied efts and the nine-spined sticklebacks are dead, too. Beetles remain, and the red wriggling larvæ of the gnat. When the road was widened for the tramcars of the London County Council, the corporation drained the pond, pulled down its daisied bank and wooden posts and rails, filled in a third of its area, built above its eastern edge a wall of bricks and concrete, and planted an iron-spiked fence. Having ravished its spirit, the L.C.C. stole the pond's birthright and severed the child from its lovely mother Kent, giving it to the County of London. A wild cherry tree used to lean out of an island in the middle of the pond when it was in Kent; but London cut down the tree, and erected a pole for the Union Jack. Perhaps, when there is no more war, the snowy blossoms of the wild cherry will drift over the water again. . . .

Tramcars stop by the pond, and return north again to the city, through the Old Kent Road. Motor-buses pass all day and most of the night.

THE OLD STAG

A pair of moorfowl lives on the island of the pond, unafraid of traffic. The hen calls her mate by a cry of *teank!* and he replies with *teonk!* They are always calling one another, in voices croaking and watery, and they dive for beetles and red-thread gnat-worms. The pond is two feet deep, and the fowls swim by paddles on their long toes.

One March morning, while the birds were singing in sunlit County Kent, and a chill, choking yellow fog darkened the sky of County London Teank rose with a tram-ticket in her bill. She had been building a nest since the previous morning. Her skill in nest-building would not have turned a chaffinch, that perfect moss-moulder and feather-felter and cowhair-weaver, into a greenfinch with envy. She merely opened her bill and dropped the ticket on the meeting-place of three thorn branches. She made many underwater journeys that day, and at nightfall the nest was finished. It was made of weed and tickets, a bootlace, a fragment of yellow cardboard with a print of *Every genuine cigarette bears the name W. D. & H. O.* upon it, and beakfuls of cat's-hair. This was Teank's first nest to be made in a tree, and she had placed it there because of the rats which swarmed on the island.

The first egg was laid five days later. In size it was between that of a hen and a pigeon, the colour of dead oak leaves, freckled and spotted red-brown. Teank laid it before the wheels of the first early tramcar yarred and screamed on the

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rails in the wood-block road. She did not return to the nest during the day, but paddled about the pond and walked the grassy bank opposite the railings for snails and worms. The pond on this side was dammed by a bank higher than the flat allotments beyond, where cabbage leaves and old tins rotted. Willows and hawthorns and alders leaned over the bank.

The next morning, long before smoke began to rise from the chimney pots of the brick houses nearer London, Teank laid her second egg. As she jumped off the nest it fell to the ground and was smashed, and although she heard the noise of the breaking shell, she did not realize that it was her egg. The first egg remained in the centre of the platform, resting in a slight hollow. Then Teonk and Teank, their black-and-white tails flipping as they peered left and right, swam to the bank and walked down to the allotments through the thorn and willow trees. Many slugs and insects they found, but a dog disturbed them, and with heavy flight, for their wings were short, they returned and splashed into the pond.

The nest being as small as the palm of a man's hand, the third egg rolled off as soon as laid, and so did the fourth and the fifth and the sixth and the seventh eggs, but Teank did not miss them. The shattered yolks below gave a rat a small meal, and what he left the ants and flies removed. As soon as her seven were laid, Teank began to brood, over the solitary egg. Previously she had roosted

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on a low bough of a box tree, near Teonk, but now she slept on the platform, with the egg between her legs. She was there during the daytime as well, except for hurried searches for food. During the brooding her blood was hotter, and she used to sink into a heavy state which was almost sleep.

In April a pair of swallows came back to the grass-grown chimney of the blacksmith's shop in the disused mill, where they had nested for five years. They twittered joyfully over the water, so happy to be back again, and took flying dips into the pond, making ripples which the sun turned to silver as of old. Two sedge-warblers from Africa had come with them, and at night the lights of motor-bus and tramcar made the cock-bird sing his sweet chattering song among the flag-irises. A cuckoo with a cracked voice could be heard calling far away in the very early morning, but the noises of traffic were often too loud during the day. Unemployed men and youths, including myself, loafed by the railings. I could see Teank as she sat on her egg.

One morning something began to tap-tip-tap inside this egg, and tip-tapped till the afternoon, when the shell opened and a head looked out. It had an appearance of old age, with tousled black down and weary time-worn eyes. *Weep-weep*, it said, opening its red bill. *Weep-weep*, as it kicked to be free of the shell; *weep-weep*, as it tried to stand on tiny legs. *Weep*, as it fell asleep. *Teank!* cried the mother, and *Teonk!* he

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answered. He did not go to her, but continued his task of trying to break up with his bill a floating crust he had been pursuing for over half an hour. Every time he pecked, the crust bobbed. The workless men were most interested in him.

The next day the mother carried her chick on her back to the water, and dived. It swam. The day was a Sunday, and at noon the railings held a line of human mothers and fathers and children, in best clothes, boots and hats. Hundreds of fragments of biscuit and bread were thrown into the pond of the broken-down mill. A pair of dingy swans had wandered there, and eaten their fill. They floated on the water, amidst specks of soot, with necks and heads laid between wings folded, but with open eyes. Sparrows fluttered and hovered over the sodden crusts, trying to peck a meal. Teonk was pushing another crust round the pond, ignorant of human encouragement and humour. Each time he knocked a bit off, he croaked in his watery voice. Banana skins and orange peel were flung in for him, but he did not want them.

Empty paper bags were blown out by small boys and girls, and cast away through the rails, their romantic voyagings watched by the owners. Three of them sank, two drifted into the island, one was wrecked upon a snag, another stayed by the body of a drowned cat floating with only part of its back visible, and one was taken by fair winds right across the ocean to America, or Africa, to the savages, where the jungle grew. The poor

boy beside me had been reading Ballantyne, out of the Free Library. We talked. I wish I knew his name and where he lived, for I would send him a copy of Jefferies' "Bevis," the best boy's book in the world. The blue eyes, widely spaced, the animation of the pale sensitive face, remain in my mind; he was trying for a scholarship,— "Mum wanted 'm to." He was ten years old, and at a London County School at Greenwich—he found another crumb in his pocket, and ate it with delight. Mum gave him a penny a week for helping her Saturday mornings: he bought broken biscuits with this wage, and "chewed 'm slow, to make 'm last, he did."

A walking-stick was hurled over the railings, a strange-shaped hairy dog after it, amid the joyful shrieks and yells of the cockney kids thrusting arms and legs through the railings. Teank, in the lee of the island, called to Teonk. The wee black chick cried *weep*, and dived. It swam underwater until its lungs ached, and up it bobbed, a hundred kicks having taken it a few inches, and away from the island. It saw a great shaggy head, and bobbed again. It came up six inches further from the island. The dog barked as he neared the stick. *Weep-weep* the chick cried, alone in the world, having no more breath. It made for the island where Teank was calling. It was an immense and terrible journey, but at last it was among the thick growth, and safe with mother.

The fear of dog soon faded from the mind of

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mother and chick. Years ago there had been in the pond a terror to wildfowl, when pike had lurked beside the weed-beds like dark logs sodden and sunken there. The last pike had been killed by the last roaming otter at the end of the nineteenth century, and in the belly of that pike at the time of its death, the miller told me, was a moorhen. The fear of pike was still in the mind of Teank, and whenever she saw the shadow of a tree move in the water, she would call the chick to her side.

In the third week of July the cuckoo with the cracked voice flew back to Africa, whence it had journeyed in the third week of April. During many springtimes its voice had been heard in the copses and spinneys which lay around a golf course, once a park owned by the Cator family. Other cuckoos' voices cracked in June, but this cuckoo's second, or dropped, note always split into two keys, like the voice of an adolescent schoolboy. I heard it first in May 1914, again in 1916; then in 1919 and the following year; and, yes, the same cuckoo in 1922, when Teank built her silly nest in the island hawthorn.

The chick had grown into a moorhen, and lived on the island with Teonk and Teank. She walked with them on the allotments in the early morning, and had no fear of the hissing, clanking traction engines and wasp-striped furniture vans that trundled along the broad main road. No longer did she say *weep-weep*, but *teunk*.

The cuckoo had been gone only a few days when Teank, the mother, began to build another nest. She made it not on the island, but among the sedges, treading a standing-place and putting weed and wet paper there. This nest was as large as a man's head, and was covered above by an arch of sedge. Teank laid five eggs on it, and then Teunk, her daughter, sat on them to hatch them. When Teunk was hungry she called Teank who crept over the eggs and brooded them while Teunk swam away and fed herself.

Teonk, the father, slept as usual on the island, because the making of a nest and the hatching of eggs did not interest him. Teunk, the daughter, did not live to see her small brothers and sisters which her warmth had helped into life, because a ragged ex-soldier shot her with a gun with sawn barrels on the allotments early one morning, and took her home for his wife and children in Deptford.

Teank sat alone in the nest. There were but three eggs to sit upon after the eleventh day, because a pair of rats found them and stole two. One dropped into the water, but the other they got to their hole unbroken. A rat turned on his back, holding it in his paws, and his companion seized tail in teeth and dragged him as though he were a sled. They returned for more, but Teank and Teonk faced them furiously, stamping with their feet and pecking with their bills so hard that the rats ran away. Only two of the eggs hatched,

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for the third was addled; it had hardly grown cold after the departure of the chicks when a rook saw it, and took it on a branch to suck it. When he had opened it he cried "Cor!" and, dropping it, flew away.

The two chicks were about a week old when the pond began to shrink. A channel had been cut in the bank above the allotments, for the weedy penstock by the mill was held by tons of mud. Boots, cans, sticks, an old sack or two with skull or bones near, dried on the shoals. Water receded from the island, until a narrow channel only was left, trickling through what looked like an estuary. The mud became pressed by the feet of birds and rats. It slowly dried, and cracks opened across it. Teonk and Teank took their chicks up the brook to the watercress beds above, and there they lived happily on beetles and snails for many weeks.

A gang of men came with shovels and wheelbarrows, dug up the silt, wheeled their loads on plank-tracks to the allotments and dumped them there, burying cabbages and tins and mouldering scarecrows. One of the shovels struck something brittle, that knocked against the wooden side of a barrow as it was turned in—a human skull, with a narrow cleft in its top, as might be made by a light blow of an axe, or the cut of a sword, from behind. A small round skull, in the Celtic shape: struck down perhaps, by a Roman, for Caesar's legions passed by the pond on the way to Londinium.

THE OLD STAG

Perhaps a cottage murder—a weighted sack pushed in from the bank at night, to sink into mud, among the eels. . . . “ ’Ave a fag, mate,” said one of the men, wearing the watered-rainbow ribbon of the 1914 Star on his shabby waistcoat, taking the cigarette stump from his lips and sticking it between the bony jaws. No money reward for a skull and a few bones, so what use reporting it to the police? The dead could not help the living, or the living the dead. So it was wheeled away in the barrow, tipped out, and buried with the fag, among many other skulls and bones; and one of those lesser skulls may have rejoiced to be with it, for the bed of the pond was a dogs’ golgotha.

A year passed, and another year, and I thought to myself, in the clear air of Devon, that never again would I go near the poor spoiled waters, where once a springtime snow of wild cherry blossom had floated above the grass-green roving roach. But one night, when I was stopping in London after a return from the Salient (whither I *must* go again and again, but why, I do not know), I dreamed of the pond, and saw again the summer-quiet lilies, and the back fin of a carp glistening brown among the floating leaves. Clouds moved in sky and water, and the blue dragonflies were on the sedges. The ghosts fled when I awakened to hear the rain on my window, and all the morning I was restless, for the spirit of the pond was calling me. So we returned, my memory and I, and stood by the railings, while the cold wind of a late winter

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afternoon blew about the road. The mill-house was gone, and the hawthorn; and the little wooden shop where without shame we could ask the old woman for a ha'porth of mixed biscuits. She called every child "Dear," and no one made a row in her shop, or cheeked her; she was so old and tiny.

New shops, a garage with plate-glass windows; the jolly inn by the pond, the "Green Man," where carters took their quarts while on the night journey to Covent Garden Market, was pulled down. Well, it had been spoiled for some years, ever since the tramlines were laid; and they kept goldfinches in cages in the glittering lights of the saloon bar. The week-end crowds came and went, and it made a fortune; the new and larger brick building will make another.

Yes, I thought, the pond was dying, and London has quite killed it. The black County, with a millstone round its neck, had stolen more of the country, and the beautiful Seven Fields of Shrofften are to be part of a new suburb. I knew every nesting-hole in every tree in Shrofften . . . the Saxon name is not good enough for a suburb; it will have a new name, easier for the suburban tongue. From the main road, by the bend where the great elms grow, the beautiful and green outline of the hills was the same as in boyhood; but what shall I see if I go there again?

And so I took my last look at the island, which during the cleaning of the pond had been cleared

THE OLD STAG

of its undergrowth of angelica and nettles. It was now tidy. The flag-pole stood straight, not crooked like the cherry-tree which is gone. They had made the island circular, and bound its edge with wooden piles; the sedges were not there. A boathouse had been built on the allotments, and beside it many small coracles were stacked. A notice-board said that this was the Children's Pool, and that all moneys from the hire of boats would be paid to a Children's Hospital in London. Then the pond had been cleaned so that tiny limbs should be set straight, and tiny faces made to unpucker, and lips to smile! I knew then why the spirit of the water, which might be of Bethesda, had come to me in a dream with a vision of its olden loveliness to be written not with sadness, but with joy. An omnibus with guardian lamps bore swiftly upon me, and as I turned to climb upon the step I heard from over the glimmering pond a watery cry of Teank! and an answer, Teonk!



